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A qualitative exploration of Christian, Native American families

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A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF
CHRISTIAN, NATIVE AMERICAN FAMILIES

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The School of Human Ecology

by
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To my children, this one's for you. I love you.

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ABSTRACT

Research on Native American families is limited and emphasizes the deficits of families and overlooks those Native American families that are thriving. This study seeks to illuminate the strengths of highly religious, Christian, Native American, married couples. The study employs a strengths-based perspective to examine how and why religious coping is meaningful and influential for these Native American couples' enduring marriages and in their efforts to be responsive parents. From interviews of fifteen heterosexual, Native American, married couples (n=30), five themes emerged from the coding and analysis: 1) Faith and Culture: "They go hand in hand", 2) Influence of Faith and Culture on marriage, 3) Generational Transference: "If you don't have it, it won't be there", 4) Religious Coping, and 5) Challenges. Research and clinical implications are addressed.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Native Americans make up only 1% of the United States population. However due to the over 517 tribes and over 300 languages and dialects, they account for over 50% of the diversity in this country (Harjo, 1993; Herring, 1997; Ogunwole, 2002). At the time of Columbus' arrival to the Americas in 1492, there were an estimated 10 million Native Americans (Eshleman, 2000) and, according to the 2005 Census, there are an estimated 2.2 million remaining (U. S. Census, 2005). However, the Native American population has continued a steady rise since 1980 to 2005 from 1.3 million to 2.2 million, an increase of 68% (U. S. Census, 2005). The major cause of this dramatic "population increase" was a result of changes to how race was reported in the 2000 census. The 2000 census provided the first opportunity for Americans to claim more than one racial and ethnic identity. Since the majority of Native Americans are of mixed race, this was a very important development. They were also provided with space to claim their tribal affiliation. Other reasons for population increases are the decrease in stigma associated with claiming Native American heritage, increased economic benefits of claiming Native American heritage, and intermarriage. "Every time the value of being Indian increases, the number of persons of marginal or ambiguous ancestry who claim to be Indian increases" (Clifton, 1989, p. 17). The growth of population is made increasingly ambiguous by the numerous definitions of Native American. Each tribe has its own enrollment criteria that is unique and may include one of many criteria ranging from proven ancestry to those who signed the original 1884 Dawes Act to simple self-report (Norton & Manson, 1996). There are currently 1.8 million Native Americans residing on

tribal lands/reservations, while the rest reside in rural and urban communities among the general population (Broome & Broome, 2007).

Many times when we study a group in an intensive research project we ask, “What don’t we know?” and “What information are we missing?” However, when studying Christian, Native Americans, we have so little in the way of accurate research we are faced with the question of “What do we know?” Herring (1991) has summarized this problem, relative to census data, as follows:

Native Americans have either been ignored or placed in the “other” category of racial identification. This designation has served to foster a lack of recognition. Native Americans can be described as the “invisible” or “faceless” ethnic minority due to this statistical designation (p. 38).

It is for this reason that much of the discussion of existing literature will be on what we know about faith and family based on existing research of other ethnic groups and the general population. Due to an increase in scholarship on faith in the social sciences over the last fifteen years we have a good foundation of knowledge to build upon.

The Current State of Faith and Family Research

If I was conducting social science research thirty years ago, I could have said the same thing about the paucity of social science research addressing religious faith as I did about the current lack of studies concerning Christian, Native Americans. In terms of scholarship on religion and families, there was little available even just fifteen years ago (Koenig, McCullough, & Larson, 2001). However, in the post 9/11 era religious issues have been forced to the foreground politically, socially, and through coping research. In a recent five-six year time frame there were at least nine special issues in the social sciences dedicated to religion:

Research on Aging (vol. 27, no. 4), *Journal of Health Psychology* (vol. 4, no. 3), *Journal of Men's Studies* (vol. 7, no.1), *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy* (vol.26, no. 2), *Journal of Family Psychology* (vol. 15, no. 4), two issues of *Journal of Family Psychotherapy* (vol. 13, nos. 1 – 4), *Michigan Family Review* (vol. 8, no. 1) and *American Psychologist* (vol. 58, no.1). (Marks, 2005, p. 173).

Most emerging scholarship indicates that religion can serve as an important coping mechanism for individuals, families, and communities (Marks, 2006; Pargament, 1997). Recent research has also shown that faith helps in the coping process through three different “dimensions” including: *spiritual beliefs* [“personal, internal beliefs, framings, meanings, perspectives” (Dollahite, Marks, & Goodman, 2004, p. 413)], *religious practices* [“outward, observable expressions of faith such as prayer, scripture study, rituals, traditions, or less overtly sacred practices or abstinence that is religiously grounded” (Dollahite et al., 2004, p. 413)], and *faith community* [“support, involvement, and relationships grounded in a congregation or less formal religious group” (Dollahite et al., 2004, p.413)].

Scholarship on faith and families continues to grow and add to the case that many families benefit from faith involvement. This scholarship includes a growing body of evidence concerning specific ethnic groups and a trend seems to be growing to investigate the impact of faith on ethnic families. This dissertation seeks to join the growing movement towards investigating ethnic families and their faith behaviors by focusing specifically on Christian, Native American families. While there is little research that is specific to the Native American families of the Christian faith, there is growing body of scholarly research on African American families of the Christian faith that will inform this study. The following section will highlight faith and family

scholarship on African Americans, a population with numerous similarities to Native Americans.

Faith and Family Research on African Americans

Although we know little about Christian, Native Americans and far less about how their faith impacts their coping, we can look to the existing research on African Americans who hold numerous similarities in their experience of oppression and racism that have similarly impacted their level of collectivism, religious involvement, spirituality and extended kin networks. As is the case for Native Americans, “religion has been one of the greatest forces in the African American community” (Chaney, 2008, p.202). Similar to the African American culture, Native American culture is one that has had to deal with trauma, loss, and assimilation at many levels, and is a rich case studies for coping and survival (Boss, 1980). Historically, one of the richest coping resources for individuals, families, and communities has been their faith (Koenig, 1998; Pargament, 1997). Findings from existing research suggests that African Americans deal with the challenges of discrimination, poverty, and health by leaning on their faith, faith community, and extended network of family and kin (Parham, 1999; Taylor, Chatters, & Levin, 2004). Most contemporary studies on both Native American and African American families will include discussion of issues related to collectivism (Corey & Corey, 2003; Harrison, Wilson, Pine, Chan, & Buriel, 1990, Taylor, Jackson, & Chatters, 1997), the importance of extended family networks (Chaney, 2008; McCallion, 1997), religious involvement (Ellison, 1993; Yoon & Lee, 2004), and prayer (Chatters, Taylor, Jackson, & Lincoln, 2008). It is for this reason that existing faith and family scholarship on African American families will be discussed throughout the literature review.

Strength-Based Research

While many studies in the helping professions focus on highlighting existing deficits and their causes, this study seeks to highlight the strengths in behavior that impact overall wellbeing. Saleebey (1996) states that:

The strengths perspective is a standpoint. Supporters believe that it offers a new way of thinking and acting professionally. Clearly, it is not a theory. But its emerging body of principle and method does create opportunities for professional knowing and doing that go beyond the boundaries of the “technical-rational” approach (Schon, 1983) so common today (p. 303).

Strength-based research could be especially helpful for informing programs designed to assist Native American families on the existing strengths that can be used as a foundation to build upon. For example, The Administration for Native Americans, a program partnered with the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Administration for Children and Families, has developed a Family Preservation Initiative focused on promoting “culturally suitable strategies that strengthen Native American communities” through providing: premarital and marital education, support for grandparents raising grandchildren, relationship skills for youth, projects geared towards decreasing family violence, and projects assisting parents (Administration for Native Americans, retrieved October 20, 2009). This program, and others like it, will benefit in their ability to implement change within the community if they continually implement research on existing strengths of families in this population.

The Contextual Model of Family Stress

One way in which to highlight Native American family strengths is to use Reuben Hills (1958) ABC-X model, also known as The Contextual Model of Family Stress (Boss, 2002). This model can be used to better understand the coping of families from

various cultures as it takes into account the unique external (economic circumstance, history, and culture) and internal contexts (structural, psychological, and philosophical) impacting a family system, as well as the system's specific experiences ('A'), resources ('B') and perceptions ('C'). All of these factors interact and determine the level of stress a family system will experience (Boss, 2002; Hill, 1958). This model fits the present study because it can be easily adapted to include cultural and religious impacts on families through experiences, resources, and perception (A, B, and C, respectively). This model also takes into account existing strengths within the family system and its contexts. While the more recent Double ABC-X model could also be applied to this study, the more simple and parsimonious ABC-X model seemed to provide a better heuristic device in connection with this study. Consistent with the aim of most qualitative research, the focus of this study is intended to be less on testing a particular model and more on offering a deep and meaningful portrayal of the participants.

Terms

The following table provides conceptual definitions of key terms for purposes of the scope of this dissertation.

Table 1. Terms and Conceptualizations.

Term	Conceptualization
Marriage	The consensual, legal union of two heterosexual people as husband and wife.
Parenting	The act of caring for and raising biological or legally adopted children.
Religion	"a search for significance in ways related to the sacred" (Pargament, 1997, p. 34)
Spiritual Beliefs	"personal, internal beliefs, framings, meanings and perspectives" (Dollahite, Marks, & Goodman, 2004, p. 413)
Religious Practices	"outward, observable expressions of faith such as prayer, scripture study, rituals, traditions, or less overtly sacred practices or abstinence that is religiously grounded" (Dollahite et al., 2004, p. 413)

(Table 1. Continued)

Faith Community	“support, involvement, and relationships grounded in a congregation or less formal religious group” (Dollahite et al., 2004, p. 413)
Coping	“the process by which resources are used to respond to stressor events” (Tausch, Silvia, Cherry, Marks, Sasser, Frias, McWilliams, & Melancon, In Press)
Religious Coping	“strategies that are grounded in religious and spiritual beliefs and practices that serve in helping people comprehend and cope with daily stressors by providing counseling, support, and optimism” (Lee & Sharpe, 2007, p.56).
Negative Religious Coping	Religious coping strategies that include “reappraisals of God as punishing, expressions of negative attitudes toward God, clergy, or church members” (Bjorck & Thurman, 2007, p. 160).
Positive Religious Coping	Religious coping strategies that include “benevolent religious appraisals, collaborative religious coping, seeking spiritual support, spiritual connection, religious purification, seeking help of clergy or church members, religious helping, and religious forgiving” (Pargament et al., 1998, p. 712).

Methodology and Findings

Native Americans traditions are deeply rooted in oral communication of storytelling and it is for this reason that this study employs a narrative-based qualitative approach of phenomenology and ethnography. Phenomenology gives the researcher the opportunity to focus on the phenomenon of the long-term marriages and family life of religious Native Americans (Creswell, 1998). Ethnography is utilized as a means for reflecting the tendency of Native Americans to communicate their values and beliefs through storytelling (Creswell, 1998). These narratives were analyzed through the process of open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; 1998) and five themes evolved: (1) Faith and Culture: “They go hand in hand.”, (2) Influence of Faith and Culture on Marriage, (3) Generational Transference: “If you don’t have it, it won’t be there.”, (4) Religious Coping, and (5) Challenges. Findings for each of these themes and their corresponding sub-themes will be presented in Chapter Four and related conclusions will follow in Chapter Five.

Contributions

The purpose of this study is to explore the cultural and faith experience of highly religious, Christian, Native American, married couples in relation to their marital relationship, parenting, and coping. This strength-based study examines how and why culture and faith impact overall family life for these participants. These families feel they are strengthened by their unique blend of culture and faith beliefs and traditions. It is important for family scientists to understand this source of strength and build programs, interventions, and policy that highlight the importance of both faith and culture for these families. This study informs the field of family science by providing an in-depth view of how and why faith is so important to Christian, Native American families as they deal with the challenges presented by the past, present and future.

CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter will include a brief overview of religion and family followed by a detailed introduction to the ABC-X model (Hill, 1958; Boss, 2002). Three dimensions of religion will be used to organize this chapter. Existing research concerning marriage, parenting, and coping will be discussed for each dimension (spiritual beliefs, religious practices, and faith community) and an application of the ABC-X model will end the discussion of each dimension. Negative religious coping will also be addressed and applied to the ABC-X model. Next I will present existing research and literature regarding Native American beliefs and values, historical events and issues, marriage, parenting and coping. Research gaps as well as application using the ABC-X model will be provided throughout. I will begin with an overview of what we know about religion and family.

Overview of Religion and Family

Pargament (1997) emphasizes that religiousness and spirituality are complex phenomena. These constructs are “complex and usually multidimensional, with no single measure or dimension being likely to capture their essential meaning” (Miller & Thoreson, 2003, p. 28). Although there are numerous ways to define religiosity this paper will utilize three dimensions of religiosity (Dollahite et al., 2004; Marks & Dollahite, 2001; Marks, 2005) to organize the review of literature. These three dimensions are spiritual beliefs, religious practices, and religious communities. Spiritual beliefs consist of “personal, internal beliefs, framings, meanings and perspectives” (Dollahite et al., 2004, p. 413). Religious practices are those “outward, observable expressions of faith such as prayer, scripture study, rituals, traditions, or less overtly

sacred practices or abstinence that is religiously grounded” (Dollahite et al., 2004, p. 413). Faith communities provide “support, involvement, and relationships grounded in a congregation or less formal religious group” (Dollahite et al., 2004, p.413). Early work on religion and family tended to only consider a single item or two that addressed only one of these dimensions (often “religious affiliation”), a measure which offers little substance or depth in connection with complex family processes (Marks, 2006).

It is important to note that this project holds a strong bias towards positive aspects of religious coping. To address this bias negative religious coping will be addressed later in this chapter.

Following a discussion of the Contextual Model of Family Stress I will present literature concerning the above three dimensions and how they relate to marriage, parenting, and coping, I will address the specific biases of this project and then move on to existing literature specifically addressing the Native American family which American, and finally the existing literature on religion and the Native American family.

The Contextual Model of Family Stress

The Contextual Model of Family Stress (ABC-X model) provides a framework of how meaning making can influence a family systems’ perception and reaction to stress. This model provides a strength-based perspective for scholars to view how a family manages stress and still remains or increases their strength and resiliency.

The ABC-X model begins with an *Event or Situation* (A) that causes change in the family system and can be either positive or negative, it is any event or situation that changes or has the potential to change the family system (McKenry & Price, 2005). The family’s *Resources* (C) include the strengths that are held by the family system. The

Perceptions (B) of the individuals and the family as a whole includes the meaning that the members attach to the *Event or Situation* (A). The Degree of Stress (X) is determined by A, B, and C. The degree of stress (X) is not always a negative result (i.e. stress or crisis). Instead it can also be the result of the family utilizing positive and readily available resources (C), holding positive perceptions (B) about the event/situation (A) resulting in the family strengthening and becoming resilient (X). It is important to note that this is not a linear model. A does not simply influence B, it is also influenced by B and all the other components of the model; as is B, C, and X (Hill, 1958; Boss, 2002).

The *External Context* includes influences and events that cause change or the potential for change on the family system where the family has no control: culture, history, economy, development, and heredity. The *cultural context* determines the “cannons and mores by which families define the way they live” (Boss, 2002, p. 44). It also includes the perceptions and rules for the family’s culture by the dominant culture. An act of racism (A) towards the family or members of the families’ culture would occur within this context. The *historical context* involves the specific time that the Event or Situation (A) occurs in history. This may include past events that continue to impact the Resources (C) and Perceptions (B) of the family and its members. The *economical context* refers specifically to the state of the economic climate in which the family functions. The family has no control over a national, economic recession yet it may influence in the family system by job loss or fewer financial resources. The *developmental context* refers to the life cycle stage that the family and its members are in at the time of the event or situation (A). The *hereditary context* impacts the health of the

family and its members and may include both mental and physical strengths and challenges. (Boss, 2002; Hill, 1958).

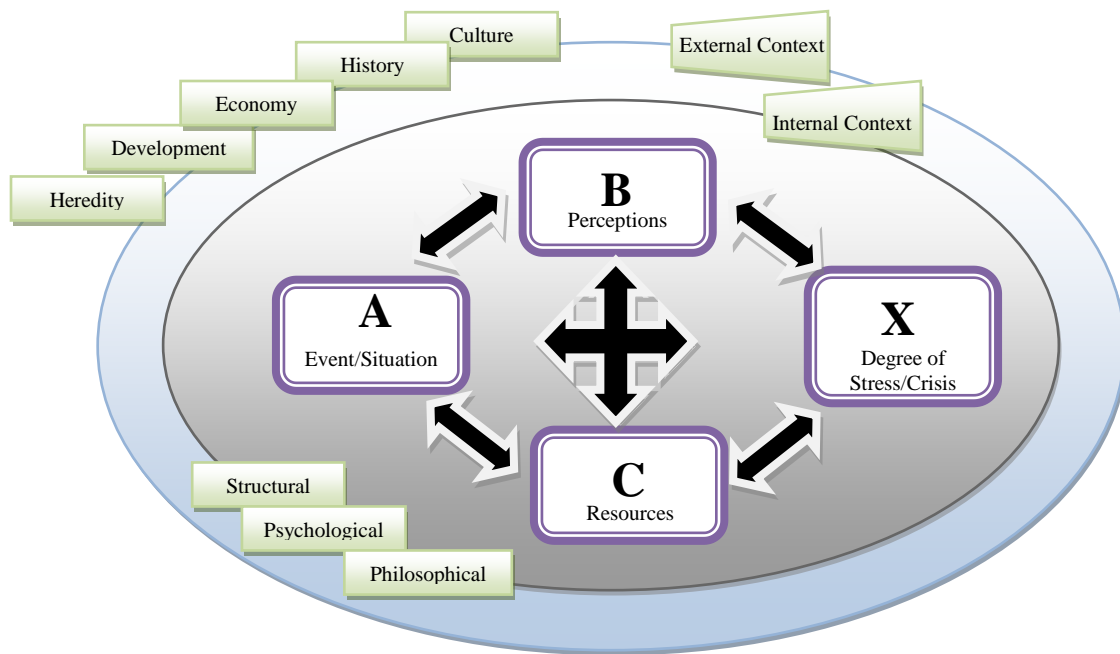


Figure 1. The Contextual Model of Family Stress. Adapted from Boss (2002, p. 40).

The *Internal Context* involves contexts that the family does influence and control: structural, psychological, and philosophical. The *structural context* includes the boundaries, roles, and rules of the family, members, and how they deal with external influences (who/what they let in or keep out). The *psychological context* includes the family's "perception, appraisal, definition, or assessment of a stressful event" (p. 44). The philosophical context refers to the values and beliefs held by the family. (Boss, 2002). All of these external and internal contexts influence how a family will perceive (B) an event (A) and the resources (C) a family will have to respond to the event and as a result influence the degree of stress (X). For this study, (X) would be the resilient outcome of a long, healthy marriage, in spite of stressors that a couple has faced or is facing.

The ABC-X model is especially appropriate for application with the Native American population because it takes into account the impact of the various levels of human ecology, as internal and external contexts. As stated earlier, Native Americans seek to find balance and harmony among these aspects of human ecology (Gossage et al., 2003). Elements of this model will be applied throughout the remainder of this chapter and a discussion of the application to this specific study will be discussed in Chapter Five.

Spiritual Beliefs

Most families in America express a belief in God, with 95% of married couples and parents declaring an affiliation to some religion (Dollahite et. al., 2004; Mahoney, Pargament, Tarakeshwar, & Swank, 2001;) a statistic that has remained above 90% for five decades (Gallup & Lindsay, 1999). For purposes of this study spiritual beliefs include “personal and internal beliefs, framings, meanings and perspectives” (Marks & Dollahite, 2001, p. 631). After presenting an overview of spiritual beliefs and marriage, parenting, and coping, I will discuss how spiritual beliefs can impact a families’ ability to navigate stressor events using the ABC-X model.

Spiritual Beliefs and Marriage

For purposes of this study and the discussion of existing literature on marriage, the focus is on heterosexual, legally married couples. When studying the enduring marriages (25 to 46 years) of 57 couples, Kaslow and Robinson (1996) found in their qualitative study that two thirds of married couples in their sample believed that their satisfaction with their relationship was influenced by their shared religious beliefs. Using a national sample of 2, 945 first time married couples, Curtis and Ellison (2002) reported

findings suggesting that dissimilar theological beliefs lead to more frequent conflict for couples although this was limited to disputes over finances. In related research, those couples comprised of spouses holding differing religious beliefs are more likely to experience marital dissolution (Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993) than those couples that shared religious backgrounds. This is especially true for Mormon marriages when compared to other Abrahamic marriages, in that those marriages that consisted of two Mormon spouses were exceptionally stable, while Mormon intermarriages were three times as likely to end in divorce over a five year period when compared to intermarriages of persons of other faiths including other Protestant denominations, Catholics, and Jews (Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993). In spite of relatively high inter-faith divorce rates across many faiths, Call and Heaton (1997) reported that marriages in which both spouses had no religious affiliation experienced the highest rate of marital dissolution.

It is evident in the existing literature that the spiritual beliefs held by spouses have a marked impact on the marital relationship. A couple's spiritual beliefs may direct the way they handle conflict in that religious teachings may prescribe certain methods in dealing with such conflict (Mahoney et al., 2001; Mahoney, 2005). Spiritual beliefs can influence and regulate sexual behavior (Mahoney, Pargament, Murray-Swank, & Murray-Swank, 2003), as well as gender roles within the marital relationship through rules communicated by religious texts and traditions (Bartkowski, 1997). Such guidelines concerning family roles may decrease ambiguity about "right" or "wrong" behaviors amongst family members (Mahoney et al., 2001).

Most religions hold the marital relationship as sacred. Many Christians believe that the marital relationship goes beyond the relationship of the two spouses to include

God as the third member in the relationship (Mahoney et al., 2003; Stanley, Trathen, McCain, & Bryan, 1998). This view of marriage as sacred has been correlated with stability and other benefits in marriage and has been referred to by Mahoney and colleagues as the “sanctification” of marriage (Mahoney et al., 2003).

Spiritual Beliefs and Parenting

Traditionally, Abrahamic religions (Christian, Jewish, Mormon, and Muslim) tend to promote the view that God calls them to the role of parent. This calling is viewed as a spiritual blessing from God, worthy of the sacrifices (Bartkowski & Ellison, 1995). A major component of parenting is the transmission of family beliefs and values from parent to child. How a parent views God is often reflected in the child’s view of God. For example, if a parent views God as a loving father the child is more likely to share that view as well (Hertel & Donahue, 1995). Dollahite (1998) suggests that if children are parented by loving, nurturing parents they are more likely to believe in God and that the concept of God as Father is more often adopted by children with loving, nurturing fathers.

Pearce and Axinn (1998) conducted a 7-wave, longitudinal study of the impact of religious attendance and importance on the mother/child relationship. Mothers (7 waves) and children (last two waves at ages 18 and 23) responded to items concerning their religious beliefs and behaviors. Results indicated that mothers who found religion to be very important reported better relationships with their children than those mothers who found religion to be less important or not important and that their children also reported this better relationship. This study is supported by others that suggest the parent-child relationship benefits from the shared values and beliefs of their religion (Pearce & Axinn,

1998). Mahoney (2005) suggests that conflicts may be avoided or resolved due to influences from shared spiritual beliefs “by providing them with a common set of values rooted in a religious system of meaning” (p. 690). Religions place emphasis on the reciprocity of the parent-child relationship through teachings that encourage children to honor their parents and provide for them (Mahoney et al., 2003). Next I will present existing literature on spiritual beliefs and coping.

Spiritual Beliefs and Coping

A person’s ability to make meaning of a situation through spiritual beliefs has been found to be a strength in coping with various forms of stress, including mental illness (Lindgren & Coursey, 1995). Corrigan, McCorkle, Schell, and Kidder (2003) studied the impact of self-reported religiousness (including beliefs and emotions in relation to a higher power) and spirituality (thinking of self as connected to God) of 1,824 persons with diagnosed mental illness and found that those who identified as being religious were less likely to self-report feelings of “anxiety, depression, and overall psychiatric symptoms” (p. 496). These findings suggest that religiousness and spirituality are beneficial resources for coping with a variety of mental health issues.

Findings by Bickel, Ciarrocchi, Sheers, Estadt, Powell, and Pargament (1998) who used the Religious Coping Styles Questionnaire (Pargament, Kennell, Hathaway, Gravengoed, Newman, & Jones, 1988) on 245 persons declaring membership to Presbyterian churches demonstrate how various coping styles used by religious persons have varying effects of depressive symptomology. Pargament et al. (1988) described three religious coping styles utilized in the study by Bickel et al. (1998): self-directing (solving problems on their own, without God’s assistance), collaborative (working with

God to solve problems), and deferring (relying on God to handle the situation on his own). Bickel et al. (1998) found that those who were more self-directing in their religious coping efforts were more likely to experience depressive symptoms, while those who tended to be collaborative were the least likely to experience those symptoms. For purposes of this paper, religious coping is defined as, “strategies that are grounded in religious and spiritual beliefs and practices that serve in helping people comprehend and cope with daily stressors by providing counseling, support, and optimism” (Lee & Sharpe, 2007, p. 56).

Spiritual Beliefs and the Contextual Model of Family Stress

When viewing spiritual beliefs of a family using the ABC-X model it is important to consider how the families’ spiritual beliefs may help families navigate events (A) that occur within the external contexts. Again, the family has no control over events (A) that occur within the external contexts (cultural, historical, economical, developmental, and heredity). When events (A) occur within one of the external contexts families with shared spiritual beliefs may perceive (B) to have more control than those couple who do not have shared spiritual beliefs. A families’ spiritual beliefs will likely influence the use of available resources (C). The belief that God hears and responds to prayers, belief of God as a protector or third marriage partner, religious coping style, and other aspects of spiritual beliefs will influence the families’ perception (B) of the event (A) and the available resources (C). Families that share spiritual beliefs and do not vastly differ in these beliefs may be more likely to deal with an external event (A) and have a positive outcome (X) such as resilience.

Spiritual beliefs can influence events (A) that occur within the internal contexts in several ways. First remember that events occurring within the internal contexts are within the family's control (structural, psychological, and philosophical). For example, many couples are guided by their spiritual beliefs when deciding if they will have children (use of birth control), when they would have a child (planning or leaving the timing up to God), and how many children they may have. The introduction of a child into the family is a structural event (A) regardless of careful planning or not. The perception (B) of having a child may be influenced by the parent's spiritual beliefs concerning their role as a parent. If the family believes that God has called them to be a parent they will likely have a more positive perception (B) of the birth of a child (A) and if they frame parenthood as a "sacred" calling from God (e.g., Mahoney et al., 2003; Marks & Dollahite, 2001) then they are also likely to draw upon spiritual resources (C) as they strive to fulfill that calling. A couple with these spiritual beliefs will likely have a lower degree of stress (X) than those couples who do not have a positive appraisal (B) of the birth of a child (A).

In the above application it is apparent that spiritual beliefs may potentially influence the family at all levels of the ABC-X model. Now I will move on to religious practices.

Religious Practices

For the purposes of this paper, religious practices include those expressions of faith that are outwardly observable, such as: rituals, prayer, study, practice and abstinences that are religiously based (Marks & Dollahite, 2001).

Religious Practices and Marriage

Marital homogamy with religious practices is as important as homogamy with spiritual beliefs and the two typically coincide. Lehrer & Chiswick (1993) state that the marital relationship is strengthened by a shared set of spiritual beliefs and practices and also summarized that:

Similarity in religious beliefs and practices of husband and wife implies that the spouses can participate jointly in religious observances both at home and in church. Religion also influences many activities beyond the purely religious sphere, including the education and upbringing of children, the allocation of time and money, the cultivation of social relationships, the development of business and professional networks, and even the choice of place of residence. Clearly, households in which the partners differ in their preferences and objectives in this area would be characterized by reduced efficiency and potentially more conflict (p. 386).

The religious practice of prayer has been found to be a positive tool for strengthening the marriage relationship. Butler, Stout, and Gardner (2002) collected mailed surveys from 230 Christian (53% Latter-Day Saints, 28% Protestant, and 19% Catholic), husbands and wives who had been married at least seven years (70% were married 21 years or more). Their findings demonstrate the numerous ways prayer can enhance a marital relationship. The results indicate that couples who prayed together reported increased levels of awareness for the perception of their partner, personal responsibility through self change, couple accountability for problem solving, and couple communication (enhanced by decreasing emotional reactivity and increasing empathy).

Religious Practices and Parenting

A passage from the Old Testament, the one book of scripture accepted as sacred by all of the Abrahamic faiths, states:

These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts.
Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and

when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.
Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.
Write them on the doorframes of your houses and your gates
(Deuteronomy 6: 6-9, NIV).

The above scripture provides parents of the Abrahamic faiths a very clear responsibility to educate and share the commands of God with their children through both education and example. Religious parents are provided with themes from the Bible that clearly emphasize the importance of the bond and spiritual responsibility between parents and children through scripture, teachings, and communication with their faith community. Marks (2004) found that parents valued the demonstration of beliefs through practice and this “practice what you preach” modality was central to their parenting. Pearce and Axinn (1998) used data from the Intergenerational Panel Study of Mothers and Children to investigate the effects of religious life on the mother-child relationship. Mothers of children born in 1961 were interviewed a total of seven times between 1962 and 1985 and the children of these mothers were interviewed in 1980 and 1985 resulting in complete data for 867 mother-child dyads. The study found that when mothers and children are similar in their religiosity they are more likely to report their relationship as positive and that attendance in religious services by the mother increases the perception of relational quality with both the mother and the child. These findings appear to be in part, due to the promotion of strong family relationships by religious teachings and practices. This study shows how important shared beliefs can be in the perception of parent children relationships for both the parent and the child.

Religious Practices and Coping

Koenig et al., (2001) discuss the broad reach that religious involvement seems to have on mental health outcomes by highlighting studies that demonstrate an association

between religious involvement and more desirable mental health outcomes that include: lower occurrence of anxiety and depression, greater life satisfaction, better self-esteem, fewer instances of substance abuse, and improved bereavement. Of these studies, 80% demonstrated a positive association between religiousness and feelings of hope. Ellison & George (1994) found that respondents who attended religious services frequently were more likely to report feelings of being valued, cared for and part of a “network of communication and mutual obligation” (p. 57).

Corrigan et al. (2003) studied a diverse sample of 1,824 persons diagnosed with mental illness who participated in the Consumer Operated Services Project and found self-reported religiousness to be significantly associated with a sense of hope and empowerment, fewer reports of anxiety, depression, and overall psychiatric symptoms and that those who reported being religious had higher outcomes of recovery and quality of life. Religious practices have a marked impact on how individuals and families cope with stressor events. Application of the ABC-X model for religious practices is presented next.

Religious Practices and the Contextual Model of Family Stress

Using the ABC-X model we can see how a families religious practices may help families to respond to events (A) that occur within the external contexts (cultural, historical, economical, developmental, and heredity). When events (A) occur within one of the external contexts a family’s religious practices will impact both their perceptions (B) of the event (A) the resources (C) that are available. These religious practices can also act as resources (C). The act of prayer, reading and/or referring to scripture, and practicing what you preach are all resources (C) that can be used to respond to an event

(Marks, 2004). For example, when parents are raising a teenage child (X) they can rely on the act of prayer and turn to scripture and religious teachings (C) to navigate this challenging developmental phase of their life. Having these practices may help this family to perceive (B) the challenge (A) as one they will be able to manage well (X).

A family's religious practices can also influence events (A) that occur within the internal contexts (structural, psychological, and philosophical). For example, if a family is faced with an event that they have faced before, their previous success or failure dealing with that event will determine their appraisal of the current event (A). This appraisal occurs within the psychological, internal context where families appraise, assess, and define events (Boss, 2002; Patterson & Garwick, 2003). A family's religious practices will likely impact appraisals of recurring events. The family may recall the use of religious practices such as prayer and bible study, especially if those practices have been perceived as helpful resources (B) in dealing with similar stressors in the past. These perceptions and practices are likely to impact the use of resources (C), spiritual and otherwise, in dealing with the current event (A) in ways that will impact the outcome (X).

In the above application it is apparent that religious practices can potentially influence the family at all levels of the ABC-X model. Now I will move to a discussion of faith communities in connection with the ABC-X model.

Faith Communities

Faith communities provide both social and spiritual support for individuals and families (Marks & Dollahite, 2001). For the purposes of this paper, a faith community includes the reciprocal relationship of involvement and support grounded in an individuals' congregation (Marks & Dollahite, 2001). With particular bearing on

marriage and family, Stanley, Markman, St. Peters, and Leber (1995) state that faith communities make up the largest group of organizations in our society that work towards preventing the breakdown of marriages. Stanley et al. (1995) further note that faith communities are influential not only through the promotion of pro-family beliefs but also because they often have the resources available to provide counseling, education, and other family supports.

Faith Communities and Marriage

Mahoney et al. (2001) describes research from the 1980's and 1990's as suggesting an important differentiation of divorce rates for couples based on church attendance. Those couples not attending church services had a 60% divorce rate; couples that did attend church services had a 44% divorce rate. The same authors also stated that those couples that attend church more are less likely to exhibit physical abusive behaviors. Amato and Rogers (1997) suggest that negative behaviors such as infidelity, substance abuse, financial mismanagement and jealousy were found at lower levels amongst married couples that attended religious services. Similarly, Call and Heaton (1997) found that couples that attend religious services together are less likely to experience dissolution of their marriage. However, the authors also found that couples where the wife attends religious services on a weekly basis and the husband does not attend are 2.9 times more likely to experience marital dissolution, compared to 2.4 for couples where both spouses never attend church. This suggests that a mismatch of attendance behaviors has a negative impact on the marital relationship.

Using NSFH data, other researchers have found that marriages of non-religious spouses have lower levels of marital stability even when compared to interfaith marriages

(Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993) and that non-religious spouses are less dependent on their marriages (Wilson & Musick, 1995). These studies depict an influence of religion on marriage, yet as Dollahite et al. (2004) reports, “[R]eligiosity has repeatedly been associated positively with both marital satisfaction and marital stability, [but] researchers have not adequately explained these findings” (p. 418). Ellison, Bartowski, and Anderson (1999) did however provide a possible explanation by stating that through classes, counseling, and other mechanisms, congregations may offer information about successful marriages, such as strategies of conflict resolution. Furthermore, social networks developed through faith communities may provide input and feedback that reinforces lifestyle choices, validating the partners’ role identities and problem definitions and offering consensual opinions regarding strategies for resolving marital conflicts.

Faith Communities and Parenting

Surrounded by a faith community, parents are provided with unique support and interactions that bring the family together through worship attendance and organized activities. Those families who take part in these opportunities to bond with their family in faith related activities are more likely to experience positive relationships than those who participate less frequently. These families benefit from religious networks and activities that promote positive, intergenerational family relationships (Regnerus & Burdette, 2006). Pearce and Axinn (1998) found that mothers who attended religious services more frequently were more likely to report a positive relationship with her children. Bartowski and Xu (2000) found that fathers who attend church more frequently provide increased monitoring, supervision and rule making for their preadolescent children.

Marks and Dollahite (2001) found in their qualitative study of fathers of special needs children that faith communities provided substantial support including social, emotional spiritual, financial, and temporal support. Knowing that the faith community was there for them was a major strength in their ability to cope with the challenges of raising a child with special needs. However, when their faith community did let them down in some way the hurt felt by these fathers was much greater than when other systems of support let them down.

Faith Communities and Coping

Waite & Lehrer (2003) stated that religious involvement is tied to “better mental health outcomes, including greater self-esteem, better adaptation to bereavement, a lower incidence of depression and anxiety, a lower likelihood of alcohol and drug abuse, and greater life satisfaction and happiness in general” (p. 258). Those who attend religious services tend to have larger non-kin social networks, more frequent communication, and experience more socio-emotional support; all of which leads to greater feelings of being valued and nurtured (Ellison & George, 1994). The increased attention that is provided to those involved in faith communities lends individuals to those who may encourage them to seek out or provide referral to mental health services (Koenig et al., 2001).

Ellison (1994) found that those who attend religious services frequently are more likely to experience larger social networks, more frequent social contact, more access to instrumental and socioeconomic support, and feelings of validation and mutual obligation with member of their social network. While we know that both Native Americans and African Americans receive rich psychological, material, and political support through their faith community (Franklin, 1997; Marks & Chaney, 2006, & McNally, 2000), far

more is known about how faith community involvement impacts the African American family. For African American families the church congregation is an extension of the family that provides spiritual, political and socioeconomic support (Chaney, 2008; Olson & DeFrain, 2003). Ellison (1995) found that African Americans without ties to a faith community were more likely to experience symptoms of depression than whites. Since both Native American and Blacks are similar in the intense interrelationship of faith and culture it would be natural to hypothesize that Native Americans may have similar results, although this is not explicit in the existing research.

Faith Community and the Contextual Model of Family Stress

As we consider the influence of faith community in successfully coping with family-level stress, the ABC-X model again becomes as useful framing tool. When events (A) occur within either internal or external contexts, a family's faith community may influence both the perceptions (B) and resources (C) the family will use to navigate the challenge (A). If the family is actively involved with their faith community and feel it is a supportive one, they may feel they are not alone in their struggle (B). The resources (C) provided through a faith community may include counseling, education, social/emotional/psychological support of congregants, and even financial support (Chaney & Marks, 2006). The availability of these resources (C) could increase the confidence (B) of the family that they can make it through and successfully handle the challenge (X).

Using the ABC-X model, it is evident how a family's involvement in their faith community can provide both positive reinforcement and resources necessary to help them be resilient. Now, I will discuss some issues regarding negative religious coping.

Negative Religious Coping

While this project is focused on the strengths of religious coping it is important to note that there are negative aspects of religious coping. Koenig et al. (2001) reminds us that religion is not without its negative influences. Religion can bring upon feelings of guilt, depression, intolerance, and anxiety. These feelings can be result of negative religious coping such as viewing God as a negative, punitive power and a constant struggle to find meaning (Pargament, Smith, Koenig, & Perez, 1998). Pargament (1997) has referred to these negative applications of religion as “red flags” and Arterburn and Felton (2001) have similar concerns with what they call expressions of “toxic faith”.

While most research depicts religious coping as a stress buffer (Koenig, 1998), there have been indications that religious coping can lead to increasing stress (Pargament, 1997). Koenig, Pargament, and Nielsen (1998) found in their study of 577 hospitalized adults, that viewing God negatively or as punishing, and viewing their congregation members or clergy in a negative light was associated to higher levels of depression, worse health, and poorer quality of life compared to those that viewed God as supportive and sought support from their congregation members and clergy. This negative appraisal of God and faith community has been found to increase as general stress increases and thus negatively impacting psychological functioning. Bjorck and Thurman (2007) studied the patterns of negative and positive religious coping of 336 Protestant church members when faced with negative life events and found that as negative events increase, so did negative religious coping strategies. These negative religious coping strategies were “related to increased depression and decreased

satisfaction with life” (p. 165). Next, I will use the ABC-X model to further explain the impact of negative religious coping strategies.

Negative Religious Coping and the Contextual Model of Family Stress

In previous applications of the ABC-X models I have discussed how positive aspects of spiritual beliefs, religious practices, and faith community can influence a family’s perceptions (B) and how these three dimensions of religion/spirituality can also serve as beneficial resources (C) as they cope with stressor events (A). The healthy use of religion can contribute to positive outcomes such as low degree of stress and/or resilience (X) (see Koenig, 1998; Pargament, 1997). However, it is important that to acknowledge that not all families experience positive outcomes (X) by relying on their faith beliefs, practices and communities. For example, if a couple is dealing with frequent marital conflict (A) and they believe that God will handle it on his own (B) and they pray and leave the conflict in Gods hands (C) without taking any other action, they are likely to continue having marital conflict as nothing will be resolved (Marks, 2008). Couples in conflict may also feel that their faith community will judge them (B) and therefore not access the available resources provided within the faith community (C). Further, if they have a view of God as punishing, couples may come to the conclusion that their current marital conflict is a punishment for prior behavior (B). These negative religious coping strategies and behaviors, which Pargament (1997) has called “red flags,” could result in a *higher* degree of stress (X) where conflict continues and could eventually escalate into violence and/or end in the dissolution of marriage (X). Thus the family would experience crisis rather than resilience.

I have offered framing examples that illustrate how spiritual beliefs, religious practices and faith community can impact the family, in both positive and negative ways. The Contextual Model of Family Stress has been applied throughout this discussion to provide clarity of how various aspects of faith influence the family's ability to navigate events. I will now move on to a discussion specific to Native Americans.

Native Americans

One in 75 (or 1.5%) of the United States population self-identify as Native American but the very small percentage accounts for over 50% of the racial diversity in our country when affiliations to tribe and/or nation are acknowledged (Ogunwole, 2002). There are 517 tribes recognized by the federal government, each having their own unique customs, traditions, languages, and belief systems (Herring, 1997).

There is debate among Native peoples concerning what they should be called. While most accept the term American Indian or Native American, the preferred identification is their historical tribal or clan name originating from their own language (i.e., Osage, Lakota, Kiowa, Cherokee, etc) (Bucko, 2007). In this chapter I will use the term Native American while discussing some of the historical, political, structural, and religious characteristics shared by most Native peoples. For purposes of this paper Native Americans are "those Native peoples indigenous to the lower 48 states who self-identify as Native American and who maintain cultural identification as a Native person through membership in a Native American nation or tribe recognized by the state or federal government or through other tribal affiliation and community recognition" (Garrett & Herring, 2001, p. 140). This definition is appropriate for this study as it

respects both federal government and the various tribal governments' definition of a tribal member.

Overview of Beliefs and Values in Native American Life

Since the introduction of Christianity to Native Americans, there has been a wide variety of response by the Native American people to the beliefs and practices held by Christian religions. While some fully accepted Christianity as a beneficial resource and influence on their spiritual lives, others rejected the ideals of Christianity completely. Forbes (2000) helps us to better understand the varying positions of Native Americans regarding the acceptance and inclusion of Christianity by providing five possible positions observed in Native American spirituality. First, there are those Native Americans who accept Christianity as the only way to salvation and reject all other religions, including all elements of Native American spirituality (Forbes, 2000). Second, there is the view that the Native Americans prior to the introduction of Christianity held a "Old Testament religion" that was incomplete. This position believes that Christianity fulfills a completeness and adds to what the Native Americans were lacking by introducing Jesus Christ. Third, there are those Native Americans who feel their original, spiritual beliefs and practices are best for their tribe and their land. They completely reject Christianity and refer to it as a "bankrupt religion" (Forbes, 2000, p. 21). Fourth, there are those Native Americans who have respect of the Christian religions, but do not feel they are appropriate for their tribe (Forbes, 2000). Lastly, there are those Native Americans who view both Native American spirituality and Christian religion as beneficial and of equal importance and relevance to their tribe. These people blend traditions of Native American spirituality and Christianity (Forbes, 2000). This last

position most closely represents the view of this studies participants' concerning their faith beliefs and religious practices. These position are likely influenced by the experiences of the previous generations with boarding schools and missions. These positions are likely passed down from one generation to the next.

The historical process of Native American Christianization through missions is one that in many ways parallels the historical process of African American Christianization through the mission to convert slaves. While there are similarities in how Christianity was introduced and woven into existing spiritual beliefs for these cultures, the view of Christianity as a resource continues to differ greatly across the two cultures. McNally (2000) discusses this discrepancy:

Students of African American religious history have long recognized that although the mission to slaves was in part an extension of a power system that upheld slavery, the Christian tradition became a resource with which African Americans tapped into sacred power; fashioned a meaningful, shared culture; and criticized the moral contradictions of a slaveholding Christian society. Why has the possibility that Native Americans could find similar resources in the Christian tradition been so consistently overlooked in the field of native religions? In part, I think it is because scholarship on native Christianity has absorbed unaware some key assumptions of the missionaries on whose documents it has relied for its data. When absent of meaningful interchange with native Christian communities, archive-bound scholarship has taken for granted a notion of religion that is out of step with what most native people practice as a more all-embracing life way (p. 845).

The spiritual belief that all things are connected spills over into how Native Americans view family. Native families include biological members (aunts, uncles, cousins, grand-parents) and non-biological members (tribe members, clan members, and others accepted into the community) (Weaver & White, 1997). Most tribes believe that all persons are interconnected and therefore we are all related. Imposing the model of a

nuclear family onto Native families is highly problematic as the family in most Native ways of life includes a variety of persons that is not limited by blood ties or household.

In American society today we introduce ourselves first by name and most often our occupation follows. This identity through what we *do* is not shared by many Native Americans. Native Americans identify themselves through their family, clan, and/or tribal identities. They introduce themselves to one another in terms of their relations and, their connection to other Native Americans (Weaver & White, 1997).

Although these beliefs and values held by most Native Americans have been passed on from generations there are various levels depicting how much of these beliefs and values are present in the lives of today's Native Americans. Constant pressure from the dominant culture and diversity in living arrangements (on or off reservation) create a continuum of acculturation levels that range from traditional to assimilated (Heinrich, Corbine, & Thomas, 1990). More specifically there have been five levels of acculturation identified for Native Americans. They are: *traditional*, *marginal*, *bicultural*, *assimilated*, and *pan-traditional* (Garrett & Pichette, 2000; Herring, 1996; LaFrombosie, Trimble, & Mohatt, 1990). These levels of acculturation could be described by utilizing a metaphor of a fenced yard representing Native American traditional ways of life, while the area outside of the fence represents the mainstream culture. Those within the *traditional* level tend to speak and think in their Native language and maintain traditional beliefs, customs and ways of worship. These persons would be comfortable inside the fenced yard and do not feel the need to go outside of the yard, nor do they feel the need to allow people in their yard. Those considered *marginal* would be standing on the fence, unsure of which side they belong. They may speak both English and their tribal language

and they do not assume tribal or mainstream ways of life. Those who are *bicultural* are able to utilize the fence's swinging gate to move on either side of the fence. They feel accepted and are able to practice both mainstream and tribal ways. *Assimilated* persons are outside of the fenced yard and rarely look into the yard for reference. These persons assume the mainstream ways of life and are accepted into that culture. Lastly, the *pantraditional* are those persons who have assimilated and live outside of the fenced yard, yet they now have the desire to learn and assume their tribal ways. They use the gate to return to the fenced yard and often learn or re-learn language, customs, beliefs, and ways of worship.

Following is a brief discussion of the unique history of Native Americans. It is not within the scope of this project to cover every event or issue in this complex history. Therefore the following discussion provides some of the major events and issues that inform this study. Following this discussion an application of both the above information regarding Native American beliefs and values and the following information concerning their unique history will be further discussed using application of the ABC-X model.

History of Christianization, Assimilation and Land Disputes

The diversity that exists within the Native American community is remarkable yet what they do have in common is even more powerful. Native Americans have been subject to much destruction of their way of life by mainstream institutions throughout United States history in an attempt at 'civilization' by the white man (Garrett & Herring, 2001; Heinrich et al., 1990; Reyhner & Eder, 1992). A detailed discussion of the process of this destruction will be discussed next.

There have been five stages of U.S. governmental policy that have lead to the destruction of Native American way of life. These stages began with the removal of Native peoples from their homelands during the 1600's to 1840 where many Native Americans were not simply relocated but slaughtered. This was followed by the stage referred to as the "reservation period" that occurred from 1860 to the 1920's. Next came a period of "reorganization" from the 1930's to 1950's, followed by the "termination" period of the 1950's and 1960's with the goal of assimilation via relocation and decreasing the dependence of Native peoples on the federal government. The last stage is termed the "self-determination" period that began in the mid 1970's and lasts to the present day. This stage has consisted of activism and sovereignty for Native American tribes (Garrett, 1996; Garrett & Herring, 2001; Heinrich et al., 1990). These stages make up what some refer to as The American Indian Holocaust (Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998).

The main motives of the Spanish, English and French settlers were ostensibly to Christianize the Native inhabitants of the newly 'discovered' America (Butler & Stout, 1998). The first Native American to be "converted" to Christianity was a Taino man who had been kidnapped by Columbus shortly after his arrival to the new land. The kidnapped Taino man was taken to Spain where he became ill and died, but not before the Spainards were able to baptize him as a Christian (Brown, 1970). "The Spaniards were so pleased that they had made it possible for the first Indian to enter heaven that they hastened to spread the good news throughout the West Indies" (Brown, 1970, p.2). Many European Christians fully believed that their Truth was the one and only and took on Christian obligation, as it was written in Genesis, to "be fruitful and multiply, and fill

the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth” (Genesis, 1:28, NIV). Thus, conversion was a main purpose for Columbus’ second journey to the Americas (Debo, 1970).

Spaniards tended to be violent in their interactions with “newly discovered” tribes. In order to justify their aggression during the 1500’s they created a document known as the Requerimiento (Requirement) as a way to make their attacks the fault of the Native Americans they were encountering. Prior to attacking a tribe the Spaniards would often recite “the Requirement” to newly discovered tribes as an opportunity to convert to Christianity. If the tribal leaders did not accept the Requirement, the Spaniards viewed this as rejecting Christianity. Such a justification gave the Spaniards religious justification for an attack (Hank 1949; Hemmings, 1978; Loewen, 2007). The following is the English translation of “the Requirement” that was read aloud in Spanish, most always without the aid of an interpreter, and at times from ship decks as they approached the new land:

On the part of the King, Don Fernando, and of Doña Juana, his daughter, Queen of Castille and León, subduers of the barbarous nations, we their servants notify and make known to you, as best we can, that the Lord our God, Living and Eternal, created the Heaven and the Earth, and one man and one woman, of whom you and we, all the men of the world, were and are descendants, and all those who came after us. Wherefore, as best we can, we ask and require you that you consider what we have said to you, and that you take the time that shall be necessary to understand and deliberate upon it, and that you acknowledge the Church as the Ruler and Superior of the whole world, and the high priest called Pope, and in his name the King and Queen Doña Juana our lords, in his place, as superiors and lords and kings of these islands and this Tierra-firme by virtue of the said donation, and that you consent and give place that these religious fathers should declare and preach to you the aforesaid. If you do so, you will do well. But, if you do not do this, and maliciously make delay in it, I certify to you that, with the help of God, we shall powerfully enter into

your country, and shall make war against you in all ways and manners that we can, and shall subject you to the yoke and obedience of the Church and of their Highnesses; we shall take you and your wives and your children, and shall make slaves of them, and as such shall sell and dispose of them as their Highnesses may command; and we shall take away your goods, and shall do you all the mischief and damage that we can, as to vassals who do not obey, and refuse to receive their lord, and resist and contradict him; and we protest that the deaths and losses which shall accrue from this are your fault, and not that of their Highnesses, or ours, nor of these cavaliers who come with us. (cf. Hemmings, 1978).

While some highly religious Spaniards were outraged by the treatment and enslavement of Native Americans, their attempts in 1542 to put into place the “New Laws” that barred having Native American slaves were debunked only four years later to improve the economic conditions of the Spanish settlers who depended on their slaves (Stannard, 1992). From the 1500’s to the 1700’s numerous clashes with Spanish, English and French colonists broke out into wars and massacres. Many colonists viewed their treatment of the Natives as God’s work trying to save heathens when they could and when they could not, trying to get them out of the way. Many early settlers believed that by the time this world ended, marked by the second coming of the Lord, they must convert all the non-believers they encountered or, if they refuse, rid the world of them (Stannard, 1992).

Much of the conflict was over land that Native Americans believed was a gift from God. No human owned, or should own, the land. Land was, and still is, considered sacred to Native Americans. While every Native American tribe has their own creation story and beliefs, many hold strikingly similar beliefs about the reciprocal relationships of humans and all elements of nature (Martin, 2001). Differentially, Europeans believed that humans were second to only God and Angels and land was desired by the Europeans as a means to increase their power and wealth. “The belief in the supremacy of

humankind over nature, so firmly embedded in Judeo-Christian culture, was entirely alien to the native peoples of North America. They could not conceive of a world solely dominated by humans.” (Rollings, 2002, p. 122).

Due to lack of translation and differing perceptions concerning the meaning of various exchanges there was also confusion between the Europeans and the Native Americans. Native Americans would often listen to the stories and scripture of European missionaries and attempt at some level to relate to them by repeating a portion and how it could compliment their own beliefs. However, many Europeans would scoff at the creation stories of the Native Americans and discount their stories of how animals and other aspects of nature had interacted with them (Rollings, 2002; Wood, 1990). Some tribes embraced the new ideas, while others fully rejected them. Others interwove the new beliefs with their own existing beliefs (Sweeney, 2008).

Most of the land removal and relocation took place under the authority of the Indian Removal Act of 1830. The most well-known of these removals included the Nez Perez, Northern Cheyenne, Navajo, and The Five Civilized Tribes (Cherokee, Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Seminole). During the Choctaw removal, 6,000 of the 13,000 perished (Nies, 1996) and both the Creeks and Seminoles lost nearly 50% of their population (Thornton, 1987). The most horrific of removals was that of the Cherokees who were treated like cattle as they were removed from their land in Georgia and forced to walk to Oklahoma (Nies, 1996). This removal of the Cherokees in 1838 is known as The Trail of Tears where one out of four Cherokees (approximately 8,000) died as a result of the conditions, treatment and disease (Thornton, 1987; Nies, 1996).

Following the removals and relocations came the allotment of Indian lands. The Dawes Act of 1887 provided the President power to allot land to individual Native Americans as he saw fit. Most of these allotments were 160 acres for each family chosen by the members of those tribes the President felt had advanced to an acceptable degree of civilization. The title to these allotments could be held by the government for a period of 25 years or more, this was presented to the Native Americans to prevent them from being taken advantage of by potentially scheming land buyers. Land not allotted to Native Americans was labeled surplus and sold; “more than 86 million acres, over 60 percent of the remaining Indian land base passed into non-Indian hands” (Neis, 1996, p. 295). This breaking up and reducing of Tribal lands further disrupted the economic, societal, and cultural aspects of these tribes and thus made them more vulnerable (Thornton, 1987; Wilson, 1998).

Following the Dawes Act, President Jackson felt that in order to complete the path to civilization for the Native Americans they must first become Christians. “Under a kind of lottery system, each reservation was assigned to one or other of the Christian denominations, who could then send missionaries to lead the assault on paganism” (Wilson, 1998, p. 308). During this time many of their cultural practices were abolished, tribes were separated by social and political divisions as a result of collaborating tribal members being rewarded and those who resisted being punished (Wilson, 1998). Many of the Anglo governmental officials and public were still not happy with only changing the external circumstances of the Native Americans and felt that the only way to “transform the inner savage” (p. 310) was to educate the children in an Anglo-American education system (Wilson, 1998). The Indian Schools followed the path and example of

the school founded by Captain Richard Pratt in 1879 called the Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania. Pratt based his education of Native children on the belief that their culture was nothing more than “worthless relics” (p. 311) and should be destroyed. He stated that his aim was to “kill the Indian and save the man” (p.312). When Native children arrived at his school they were forced to adapt to Anglo-American education, religion, clothing, haircuts, diet, housing, and names and were no longer allowed to speak their native language. Within three years of the opening of the Carlisle school, half of the children had died (Wilson, 1998). By 1900 22,000 students were enrolled in over 300 Indian schools though out the country, all with the same goal of complete assimilation (Wilson, 1998).

Throughout the early 1900’s Native Americans continued to be victims of the assimilation goals of an Anglo-American government. Disputes over land, oil, education, employment, citizenship and many other issue remained prevalent and rarely ended in the Native Americans favor (Neis, 1996; Wilson, 1998). There were some improvements in the treatment of Native Americans including the Meriam Report of 1928 that reviewed and reported the conditions of “Indian economies, health, education, and the government’s administration of Indian affairs and trust funds” (Neis, 1996, p.330). Numerous failed attempts to introduce new policies benefiting the Native Americans followed. Still many tribes faced termination between 1953 and 1962. In 1968 the American Indian Movement began seeking to protect traditional ways of Native Americans and provide tribes with legal counsel and representation of Native interests (Neis, 1996). In 1979 the American Indian Religious Freedom Act became law and

Native Americans were provided with the same rights of Anglo-Americans to practice their own religion (Neis, 1996).

So how does this inform what we need to know about Native American families today? Let us again use the ABC-X model to frame and illustrate how the values, beliefs, and history of Native Americans can influence a family's ability to handle stress. The way a Native American family might perceive (B) a given event (A) will be influenced by their level of acculturation. For example, a family who remains traditional may perceive tribal resources (C) as highly beneficial (B) and prefer to access those resources, instead of resources (C) available in the dominant culture. These families would rely on traditional beliefs, values, and practices to frame (B) their approach to the given situation (A). Those families who are considered marginal, unsure of if they belong in their tribal culture or the dominant culture, may have more of a challenge than those who are traditional - a challenge Boss (2002) refers to as ambiguity. These families may view both tribal resources (C) and resources provided by the dominant culture (C) as inaccessible (B) because they do not feel they truly belong to either culture. This perception (B) may limit their desire or ability to access needed resources (C) and therefore may increase the degree of stress experienced by the family.

The collectivist view of family in the Native American culture includes both blood and non-blood family members and therefore provides more persons for a family in need to turn to for support and resources. However, this strength also presents challenges because the large number of family and kin ties also involves more people relying on the family for support (see also, Marks et al., 2006). In connection with this duality, the ABC-X model allows for the influence of both positive and negative resources. It is clear

that having a strong family support (C) can positively influence how a family will perceive (B) and event (A) and can positively contribute to a resilient family (X).

However, it is of equal importance to acknowledge that with this added support of an extended family, there are expectations to *provide* support (C) to those family members as well. These expectations can actually *increase* the level of stress for the family and negatively impact their ability to navigate a stressor event (A).

Native American Marriage

At the time of this project little attention has been paid to enduring Native American marriages. One study focusing on strong, Native American marriage is by Skogrand, Mueller, Arrington, LeBlanc, Spotted Elk, Dayzie, & Rosenband (2008) who states that an “extensive research, including a review of the Native Health Database at the University of New Mexico, revealed no studies about marriage relationships in American Indian/Alaska Native populations” (p. 26). The author conducted qualitative interviews with twenty-one Navajo couples (n=42) who self-reported having strong marriages. The authors sought to examine the perceived strengths of these strong marriages. Participating couples reported their marital strengths to be included in the following themes and sub-themes,

(1) Maintain Communication (e.g., be open with each other, listen to each other, be positive, give praise to each other), (2) Nurture Your Relationship (e.g., be committed, focus on each other, learn to enjoy marriage), (3) Learn About Marriage (e.g., receive advice and counsel from family members, observe other couples, learn from spiritual leaders and counselors, learn from each other, learn from personal experience), (4) Be Prepared for Marriage (e.g., be prepared as an individual, have a plan as a couple), and (5) Have a Strong Foundation (pp. 30-37).

Couples reported that their strong marriages were benefited by spiritual

resources such as bible study/teachings, religious leaders/counselors, and tribal elders. Participants also shared that shared religious and traditional values strengthened their marriage and reduced conflict. This study provides an exciting first look into strong Navajo marriages.

Existing research on the enduring marriages of African Americans can be used to inform researchers interested in Native American marriages by providing insight into how marriage endures in fellow minority cultures with a similar history of cultural loss, oppression, and repression. Marks, Hopkins, Chaney, Monroe, Nesteruk and Sasser (2008) studied the challenges and benefits of marriage for the thirty African American couples in self-reported happy, enduring marriages. Four key themes surfaced, the first of which related to the challenges in African American marriages. These challenges included: (a) the struggle to find a balance of work and family time demands, (b) concerns for family that may be involved in “street violence”, and (c) the constant provision of support for family members and acquaintances. Marks and colleagues’ second theme encompassed the process of overcoming external challenges to marriage. This process involved the importance of having a committed spouse to rely on as a source of strength and also turning to God in prayer - a religious practice addressed earlier in this chapter. The third theme focused on the couples resolving their intramarital conflict by communicating, managing differences, and relying on their faith as a resource for conflict resolution. The final theme concerned the importance of unity and of being equally yoked (Marks et al., 2008).

There are both similarities and significant differences between the participants in the above mentioned study and the results of the present study. In Chapter 5, a few of the

similarities between strong black marriages and what this study discovers about strong Native American marriages will be discussed.

Native American Parenting

The Native American child is considered a special gift from the creator (Glover, 2001) and is at the center of the Native American family, much of the day to day activities in the community include children (Rogers, 2001). This constant inclusion provides ample opportunity for children to learn their role within the community through watching and listening (Rogers, 2001). Due to the historical removal of Native American children from their homes today most Native American families continue to place great importance upon the socialization of their children and many attempt to re-claim their 'old ways' by passing on known traditions to their children and teaching them their Native language if still known.

A major issue for Native Americans is the transfer of their cultural beliefs and practices. Parents depend on the stories of elders for rearing their children and transferring their culture to the next generation, and both parents and children observe the behavior of others within their culture to understand how they are to behave (Cheshire, 2001). Mothers are considered the primary source of cultural transfer and socialization (Lafrombosie, Heyle, & Ozer, 1990). Native American parents display a significant amount of respect for their children beginning at infancy when cradleboards are used to prop babies up so that they may be a part of the family activities (Kawamoto & Cheshire, 1997). Although many Native American parents value the old child rearing methods passed down from previous generations, they also display attitudes and parenting styles that reflect those of the dominant culture (Glover, 2001).

Elders are a major aspect of Native American child rearing and are often active in the teaching and discipline of future generations. Considered the “Keepers of Wisdom”, elders counsel parents and actively communicate and display traditional values, beliefs, and customs (Garrett, 1996), while encouraging the parent and child in their relationship (Glover, 2001). Grandparents tend to hold important roles within the Native American family and are highly respected by all members. Many grandparents within the Native American family may not be blood related because children are often taught to refer to all elders as grandmother or grandfather in a display of respect and honor. Elders provide knowledge of the old ways and pass on their knowledge to the younger generations (Red Horse, 1980).

Children are encouraged to be creative by helping to make their ceremonial regalia and by participating in the creation and performance of music, dance, and art (Kawamoto & Cheshire, 1997; Rogers, 2001). While children seem to find a meaningful role within their cultural communities they often find it difficult to find their place in mainstream culture thus viewing themselves more negatively than do white children (Luftig, 1983). This could be, in part, because Native American children are often faced with the realities of being misunderstood and not valued by the dominant culture.

Native American youth have a major developmental challenge in their need to balance the demands of their culture and that of mainstream society. Many attempt to preserve their traditional way of life, while also attempting to thrive in mainstream society. The challenge to maintain their ethnic self is added to the already daunting nature of adolescent identity crises, increasing their experience of developmental stress (Herring, 1991; Herring, 1994; Kawamoto & Cheshire, 1997).

Much of the existing literature that concerns Native American children are historical in nature (depicting the forced removal of Native children from their homes and into boarding schools or adopted into White homes) or superficially address the issues facing these children in today's culture by including them as a variable in a larger study. There are studies that have specifically included Native American children as their own racial group. Those studies focus on deficits such as increase risk of youth substance abuse (Beauvais, 1996; Dick, Manson, & Beals, 1993; Dixon & Roubideaux, 2001; Galliher, Evans, & Weiser, 2007; Novins & Baron, 2004; Spears, Longshore, McCaffrey, & Ellickson, 2005), adolescent suicide (Freedenthal & Stiffman, 2004) and problematic outcomes for Native American children due to parental gambling (Momper & Jackson, 2007). While it is true that Native American children and youth have been found to have significantly higher rates of developmental, behavioral and mood disorders, suicide, and substance abuse compared to other ethnic groups (Manson, Bechtold, Novins, & Beals, 1997) it is important to note that we need to have more research concerning the strengths of these children and youth to gain a more balanced understanding.

Native American parents that are actively connected and involved with their tribal community are provided with a rich pool of familial/tribal support and associated resources that can be used in raising their children. When a stressor, such as parent-child conflict (A), occurs these parents can go to grandparents, aunts, uncles, and other tribal elders for advice and support (C). These readily available persons of support may provide the parents with a confidence (B) that they can handle the conflict (A) successfully (X). Yet, at the same time these readily available family and tribal members may also place high expectations on the parents that could contribute to higher degree of

stress or reluctance to reach out if the parents are not traditional (as discussed in earlier discussions of the impact of varying levels of acculturation). Both parents and children's perception (B) of events (A) and resources (C) may be influenced by the challenge of balancing the demands of tribal expectations and those of the dominant culture.

Native American Coping Issues

The Lakota describe mental health as "being in a state of well being" (LaFromboise, Heyle, & Ozer, 1990, p. 465) and for the Navajo one reaches their ideal state through "balance with self, family, community, and Mother Earth" (Gossage et al., 2003, p. 34). Mental illness is often viewed as the outcome of weakness and lack of discipline (Herring, 1991). This is a view shared by most tribes who believe that health is a choice that one makes by keeping harmony and balance:

If one stays in harmony, keeps all the tribal laws, and all the sacred laws, one's spirit will be so strong that negativity will be unable to affect it. If one chooses to let anger or jealousy or self-pity control him, he has created disharmony for himself. Being in control of one's emotional responses is necessary if one is to remain in harmony. Once harmony is broken, however, the spiritual self is weakened and one becomes vulnerable to physical illness, mental and/or emotional upsets, and the disharmony projected by others (Locust, 1985, p. 14).

Carol Locust (1985) provides 10 beliefs related to health commonly held by most Native American tribes:

(1) American Indians have a belief in a Supreme Creator. In this belief system there are lesser beings also. (2) Man is a three-fold being made up of a body, mind, and spirit. (3) Plants and animals, like humans, are part of the spirit world. The spirit world exists side-by-side and intermingles with the physical world. (4) The spirit existed before it came into a physical body and will exist after the body dies. (5) Illness affects the mind and spirit as well as the body. (6) Wellness is harmony in body, mind, and spirit. (7) Unwellness is disharmony in body, mind, and spirit. (8) Natural unwellness is caused by the violation of a sacred tribal taboo. (9) Unnatural unwellness is caused by witchcraft. (10) Each of us is responsible for our own wellness (p. 2).

The history of forced assimilation and destruction of tribal lands and traditions has resulted in the generational transmission of the trauma experience. Historical Trauma (HT) is “cumulative emotional and psychological wounding, over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma experiences” and the Historical Trauma Response (HTR) is the “constellation of features in reaction to this trauma” (Brave Heart, 2003, p. 7). HTR often manifests itself within the Native American community through destructive behaviors such as substance abuse (Brave Heart, 2004; Gossage et al., 2003; Szlemko, Wood & Thurman, 2006; Walls, Whitbeck, Hoyt, & Johnson, 2007), depression and anxiety (McNeil, Porter, Zvolensky, Chaney, & Key, 2000), and higher rates of suicide (Bachman, 1992). Many Native Americans feel these mental health problems derive from what is referred to as a “soul wound” caused by the effects of colonization and assimilation (Duran, Duran, & Brave Heart, 1998).

Research on the Lakota by Brave Heart and DeBruyn (1998) has explored the impact of historical trauma on numerous aspects of Native life and found similarities with those whose parents and grandparents survived the Jewish Holocaust.

Like children of Jewish Holocaust survivors, subsequent generations of American Indians also have a pervasive sense of pain from what happened to their ancestors and incomplete mourning of those losses (Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998, p. 64).

Many Native Americans believe that modern mental health practices such as counseling and medications interfere with the Native American cultural values and beliefs, thus they rarely seek out help for their mental health concerns (LaFrombosie, 1988). Regardless of their reluctance to seek mainstream interventions, Native Americans face numerous mental health problems according to the diagnostic criteria of mainstream culture and in

some cases do so at much higher rates in comparison to other racial groups. Native Americans have the highest levels of substance dependence (9%) for all ethnic groups in the United States (Nehelkopf & Phillips, 2003). Among those crimes committed by Native Americans reports differ from indicating that 59% to 95% were alcohol related (Gossage et al., 2003). Robin, Chester, Rasmussen, Jaranson, and Goldman (1997) investigated the use of mental health services by Native Americans and found that 17% of the participants leaned on a traditional healing methods for mental health issues, including substance abuse problems. Native American traditional healing traditions have been defined as:

Those which may involve traditional medicine practitioners, such as medicine men and women, herbalists, and shaman, to restore an individual to a healthy state using traditional medicines, such as healing and purification ceremonies, teas, herbs, special foods, and special activities such as therapeutic sings, prayers, chants, dancing, and sand painting (Chee, 1991, p. 2276).

While we do not know specific health benefits for highly religious, Christian, Native Americans, we do know that there are increased benefits for highly religious African Americans compared to their Caucasian counterparts. Hummer et al. (1999) describe an impressive 7.6 year increase of life expectancy for those who attend religious services (at least once weekly) and those who do not. However, for African Americans the difference in life expectancy was nearly two times greater with those frequently attending living 13.7 years longer than those who do not attend.

Intrigued by this finding Marks, Nesteruk, Swanson, Garrison, and Davis (2005) explored the possible reasons for this difference in increase mortality by interviewing 32 (16 women and 16 men) African American, married parents between 2001 and 2003. Questions centered around how their religious beliefs, practices, and community

influenced their stress and coping behaviors, family functioning, and health related issues. The authors found six relevant themes:

1. Active Faith Involvement and the Aged: “It keeps them alive...”
2. Avoiding Negative Coping: “You become what you do...stay away from the street life”
3. Evading Violence: “The ones who don’t attend church are...dying at a young age”
4. The Absence of Hope: “Giving up on faith...giving up on life”
5. Social Support: “Church family is family”
6. The Power of Prayer: “Cast your cares upon the Lord”/”You can overcome...” (Marks et al., 2005, p. 454).

These themes reinforce and provide a new depth into the “hows” and “whys” behind religion’s influence on both the mental and physical health of highly religious persons. Further, this research offered new insight into how culture influences this relationship.

As discussed previously, Native Americans have a high incidence of alcohol abuse. When applying this situation (A) to the ABC-X model we can see that the perception (B) of addiction is heavily influenced by cultural beliefs of wellness (external context of culture). As discussed earlier, Native Americans tend to view mental illness, such as addictions, as a weakness and a result of not choosing to balance the self, family, community, and the elements. This view of addiction as a weakness and imbalance (B) may result in a family dealing with an alcoholic loved one (A) being reluctant to seek help (C). The history of pain and the level at which it has been passed down through the generations and internalized by the family and its members (Historical Trauma Response) will greatly influence how the family and the individuals in the family perceive (B) the addiction (A) and the resources (C) available to deal with the addiction.

Summary

In summary, this study examines a research-neglected group of highly religious, Native American, married couples and the “hows” and “whys” of the reciprocal influences of culture and faith on their marital relationship, parent/child relationship, and physical and mental health. This is a strength based study seeking to provide an in-depth view of how these families thrive in the face of diversity and challenge unique to this population.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

Research on family and religion has yet to provide an adequate portrait of the religious, Christian, Native American family in today's society. Much attention has been paid to the unique history of this culture and the common ailments suffered by its people. Yet, the Native American people have continually been overlooked and forgotten by many national quantitative research studies that have failed to distinguish them from other ethnic groups (Gruber, DiClemente, & Anderson, 2002; Kawamoto & Cheshire, 2004). "One frustration has been the lack of valid, reliable instruments designed for use with American Indian families" (Kawamoto & Cheshire, 2004, p.391). Native American traditions place much emphasis upon passing meanings and traditions on to the next generation through storytelling, most of which is done orally but rarely in written word (Smith, 2006). Given this cultural tradition and tendency, a narrative-based qualitative approach to research with Native American families would seem to be the ideal methodological fit.

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of highly religious Native Americans couples in an enduring marriage, who are actively involved in both religious and cultural practices. In this chapter a description of qualitative research methods will be provided followed by a description of the sampling methods and characteristics, interview procedures, what constitutes high standards of qualitative research and methods for data analysis.

Description of Qualitative Research

Qualitative research lends itself to four discrete goals beginning with the aim for depth over breadth. The second goal of qualitative research is to discover the hows and

whys of human thought, behavior and meaning making. The third goal lends itself to the study of family structure and process among multiple levels/relationships. The final goal of qualitative research is to be a source of discovery versus verification of pre-existing theories. It is the aim of discovery that lends qualitative research to more inductive approaches of theory building (Ambert, Adler, Adler, & Detzner, 1995; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This study incorporates and applies the definition of qualitative research as:

a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3).

It is important to be aware that there are numerous approaches to qualitative research. Creswell (1998) discusses five traditions in qualitative inquiry, they are: biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography and case study. *Biographies* are studies of an individual's experiences relayed to a researcher through interview, writings, or archives and may include any of the numerous types of biography such as: biographies, autobiographies life histories, and oral histories (Creswell, 1998). *Phenomenology* is the study of the lived experiences of numerous individuals concerning a specific phenomenon (Creswell, 1998). *Grounded theory* is intended to "generate or discover a theory" (Creswell, 1998, p. 56). The researcher begins the study without a preconceived theory to base the research upon. Instead the researcher looks for the data to demonstrate a theory of its own, representing the reality of the data (Strauss & Corbin,

1998). *Ethnography* describes a culture or social group through their “observable and learned patterns of behavior, customs, and ways of life (Creswell, 1998, p. 58). Derived from cultural anthropology, ethnographies describe and interpret the behavior of a cultural group (Schwandt, 2001, p. 80). *Case studies* are in-depth studies that focus on a “bounded system” over time (Creswell, 1998, p. 61). Case studies examine the interaction between the “bounded system” and its context with multiple variables in mind (Gilgun, 1994).

While this study does include elements of each of the above approaches, this dissertation project particularly combines Creswell’s (1998) approaches of *phenomenology* and *ethnography*. Phenomenology gives the researcher the opportunity to focus on the phenomenon of the long-term marriages and family life of religious Native Americans. Ethnography is utilized as a means for reflecting the tendency of Native Americans to communicate their values and beliefs through storytelling. This narrative approach allows the informants to provide contextual information and place meaning on their responses in an effort to best reflect their reality (Halverson, Puig, & Byers, 2002). This combination highlights the unique ability of qualitative methods to present a richness not found in quantitative methods by depicting the emotions, conflicts, and motives of the respondents (Ambert et al., 1995). I will now discuss the recruitment process used for this dissertation.

Recruitment

Recruitment of participants was conducted utilizing a purposive sampling procedure known as the gatekeeper referral method (Dollahite & Marks, 2005) by first beginning with Native American elders and religious leaders within the researchers’

community and of neighboring tribes. Each elder and religious leader was approached via email, letter, or face to face meeting and introduced to the research endeavor then asked to refer no more than two couples to be interviewed. The criteria for a qualifying couple stated that both spouses must be of Native American descent (recognized by federal governing agencies and/or tribal elders), they must be active in both cultural traditions and faith practices, have or have had at least one child and they must have been married for at least 10 years at the time of the interview. Couples must also be actively involved in both cultural and faith practices. Elders and religious leaders were encouraged to provide referrals for two couples that did not know one another intimately and if possible come from differing tribal communities and/or religious congregations. Interviewed couples referred by elders or religious leaders were asked to refer one couple to participate and then no other couples were contacted from that line of referral. To obtain a referral from a participating couple I asked if they had knowledge of a couple that: (1) has been married for at least 10 years, (2) would describe themselves as happily married, (3) are active in both religious and cultural practices, and (4) are both of Native American descent.

Once a couple was referred to the research project they were contacted via phone or email and presented with the parameters of the interview and who referred them. Once the couple communicated a desire to participate an interview was scheduled. One week prior to the interview a reminder was sent to the email address and/or postal address provided by the participants. A day or two prior to the interview a phone call was made to confirm the scheduled time and location.

The use of gatekeepers can be very beneficial when the researcher is not a member of the group being studied. Gatekeepers are often supportive and enthusiastic in their assistance to the researcher (Thomas, Bloor, & Frankland, 2007). The researcher must be cautious when utilizing the gatekeeper method that participants are not all similar as this could skew findings. Gatekeepers may know numerous participants who fit the parameters of the study; however these participants may be very similar. This is why I limited the referrals provided by each gatekeeper to only two couples.

The recruitment methodology I employed (requesting referrals from respected tribal “gatekeepers”) seemed to be very comfortable for the gatekeepers and the participants. I chose to begin recruitment through a gatekeeper after consulting with a tribal leader who suggested that this would decrease skepticism and provide a frame of reference for how I came to contact them. I began with gatekeepers that I knew personally and had shared numerous experiences with during various tribal traditions. Prior to asking them for help we sat down and reflected on our shared experiences and they shared many stories that were intended to help me in my current stage of life as a new mother. This has been my experience of common display of respect by listening to the elders prior to asking them for assistance. My prior experiences with tribal leaders prepared me for this first step in the recruitment process.

Interview Procedures

Interviews were conducted in the participants’ home, church or preferred public place such as library or community building. After introductions were made and a brief explanation of the interview process was given, the audio recorder was turned on for the duration of the interview procedure. Following a discussion of the participants’ rights

they were asked to review and sign the informed consent form and complete a brief demographic questionnaire. Once these procedures were completed the interviewer began the semi-structured interview of 27 questions (see Appendix C). The interview consists of questions concerning: (1) the origins, benefits and costs (as they relate to their marriage) of their religious and cultural practices and beliefs; (2) connections between their faith, culture and your family life; (3) connections between their faith, culture and parenting; (4) connections between their faith, culture and the surrounding culture; (5) and lastly the challenges of faith, culture and family life. Both spouses were provided an opportunity to answer each question. The interviewer alternated between husband and wife for the first response to each question. Following each initial question prompts were provided by the researcher to ensure that the responses were both deep and rich in explaining the ‘hows’ and ‘why’s’ related to the specific question. The interview process took approximately one to two hours.

There was a challenge to find the right words for certain interview questions. When I first began interviewing I used the words “religion” and “culture” in many of my questions. Some participants discussed my use of the word religion as somewhat limiting or non-representative of their experiences. They felt the use of the words “faith” or “spirituality” was more representative of how they viewed their Christian beliefs and practices. Also, “culture” was replaced by many participants with the word “ways” or with their specific tribe name and ways, for example, “Kiowa ways”. It was important to the participants to have questions concerning their tribal beliefs include the name of their tribe (i.e., Osage beliefs) and not just a generic question regarding Native Americans beliefs.

The process of interviewing spouses together provided an opportunity to observe the married couple as they interacted in “co-creation of meaning” (Holmberg, Orbuch, & Veroff, 2004; Lambert & Dollahite, 2006, p. 441). Babbie (2004) supports the method of interviewing spouses together by stating that the process “frequently brings out aspects of the topic that would not have emerged from interviews with individuals” (p. 303).

Another advantage of interviewing spouses together is that three data points are available for triangulation (husbands’ responses, wives’ responses, and researcher observations). Triangulation will be discussed in detail in the trustworthiness section of this paper.

However, there is some concern amongst scholars who prefer interviewing individuals. The preference towards conducting individual interviews stems from the position that they provide more candid responses and take into account the issues of gender and power (Seymor, Dix, & Eardley, 1995). These are valid concerns and were addressed in the following ways: (1) each spouse was given the opportunity to answer each question and the first response alternated with each question, spouses were also given the opportunity to comment and/or add to their spouses responses (Marks et al., 2008); (2) for each of the interviews (15/15) a female conducted the interview (Marks et al., 2008). In many cases interviewing spouses individually is much more appropriate when issues of a negative nature are being discussed. However, this interview is strength-based in that the questions concern what the couple and family does well, and the interviewees are self-reported to be happy in their marriages. While I anticipated that the couple interview would provide an opportunity for spouses to prompt one another and expound upon each other’s responses, it is possible that the issues of power and gender limited their responses and this is a limitation of the study.

Following the completed interview the audio file was transcribed by the researcher or a transcriptionist. Audio files were given a number so that the transcriptionist would have no knowledge of the participants' identity. Once the researcher received completed transcripts, they were read simultaneously while listening to the audio to make corrections if necessary and to re-familiarize with the data.

Two to three weeks following each interview an email was sent and/or a phone call was made to the participants to discuss their experience of the interview and to offer them an opportunity to share any additional experiences/information that they feel was left out of the interview. This form of member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) allowed the researcher an opportunity to strengthen the credibility of the study.

Sample Characteristics

This study includes interviews with 30 highly religious Native Americans (15 married couples) who are active in both religious and cultural beliefs and practices. Couples were married for at least ten years at the time of interview and have at least one child. Information concerning denomination, tribal affiliations, place of residence, age, number of children, ages of children, number of years married, education, percentage of income tithed, as well as time spent in religious and cultural activities will be collected from each individual respondent.

While participants had numerous similarities, they also differed in many ways. The participants were from twelve tribes and four faith denominations. Participants ages ranged from 31 to 75 and their years of marriage ranged from 10 years to 44 years. Education level varied widely, with some participants having graduated high school, some completing technical/vocational degrees/certifications, and other attending college,

and/or graduating with a bachelors and/or masters degree. Time devoted to faith practices varied from one hour to as many as twenty hours per week. Time devoted to cultural activities also varied, with some engaging in half an hour a week and others reporting that it was impossible to count because “daily life revolves around cultural life style”.

Table 2. Summary of Participants

Case	Yrs married	Age	# of children	Education Level	Denomination	Tribe	% Income Tithed
NAH&W1	35	H:58 W:55	1	H: B.S. W: B.S	Baptist	H: Comanche/Kiowa W: Creek	10%
NAH&W2	13	H:36 W:31	3	H: Some college W: Some college	Catholic	H: Osage W: Osage	10%
NAH&W3	30	H:53 W:52	3	H: B.S. W: M.S.	Baptist	H: Osage/Seneca W: Cherokee	20%
NAH&W4	42	H:61 W:63	3	H: B.S. W: B.S.	Baptist	H: Sac & Fox/Delaware W: Cherokee	10%
NAH&W5	38	H:60 W:60	3	H: P. A. Cert. W: B. S.	Catholic	H: Osage W: Osage	10%
NAH&W6	54	H:75 W:73	4	H: High School W: High School	Catholic	H: Osage W: Osage	20%
NAH&W7	11	H:41 W:40	3	H: B. S. W: M.B.A.	Methodist	H:Cherokee W: Cherokee	10%
NAH&W8	11	H:46 W:50	2	H: Associates W: Some Grad	Catholic	H: Osage/Cherokee W: Choctaw	20%
NAH&W9	39	H:58 W:57	2	H: High School W: High School	Baptist	H: Osage W:Osage/Cherokee	7%
NAH&W10	10	H:50 W:51	3	H: B.S. W: Some college	Methodist	H: Sac & Fox(Meskwaki) W: Seminole	5%
NAH&W11	21	H:50 W:43	4	H: Associates W: Some college	Baptist	H: Creek W: Creek	1%
NAH&W12	19	H:45 W:41	2	H: B. S. W: B. S.	Christian	H: Creek/Yuchi W: Creek/Yuchi	10%
NAH&W13	10	H:34 W:33	2	H: B. S. W: Some college	Christian	H: Creek/Yucki W: Apache	10-12%
NAH&W14	44	H:65 W:62	3	H: Some college W: Some college	Methodist	H: Comanche W: Kiowa	10-15%
NAH&W15	42	H:64 W:65	3	H: M.S. W: M.E.	Methodist	H: Kiowa W: Comanche/Kiowa	10-15%

Trustworthiness

The issue of rigor, validity and reliability in qualitative research is known as trustworthiness. It is important for researchers to represent the group/individuals and the issues they are studying consistently and accurately. Trochim (1999) uses the concept of hitting a target with an arrow. The center of the target represents the concept being studied. Each arrow shot represents each person you are measuring. “If you measure the

concept perfectly for a person, you are hitting the center of the target. If you don't you are missing the center. The more you are off for that person, the further you are from the center." (Trochim, 1999, p. 117). In qualitative research, Trustworthiness, hitting the target for each person, is expressed by four standards: credibility, dependability, triangulation, and confirmability (Denzin, 1994). Each of these are discussed next.

Credibility relates to the ability of the researcher to accurately portray the intended meaning of the respondent (Schwandt, 2001). Gilgun, Daly, & Handel (1992) suggests that researchers ask themselves, "Am I communicating what my informants are telling me?" (p. 28). Procedures such as persistent observation (Dienhart, 1998), peer debriefing (Schwandt, 2001), and member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was used to increase credibility in this study and will be explained in depth during the discussion of data analysis.

Dependability refers to the researchers ability to create a research process that is "logical, traceable, and documented" (Schwandt, 2001, p.258). To increase dependability for this study the author used a structured interview that provided a consistent and stable format for the interviews. The 27 question interview was developed by my major professor Dr. Loren Marks for prior studies of religion and family and culturally specific questions were added to address the uniqueness of the Native American culture.

Triangulation refers to the use of multiple informants to establish validity and "is a means of checking the integrity of the inferences one draws. It can involve multiple data sources, multiple theoretical perspectives, multiple methods, or all of these" (Schwandt, 2001, p. 257). In effect, the standard of triangulation is a demand for internal checks and balances. This study included two informants; (the husband/fathers and

wife/mothers), as well as a third party observer, the interviewer/researcher. Triangulation “involves corroborating evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme of perspective” (Creswell, 1998, p.202).

Confirmability reflects the demand of both quantitative and qualitative research that the researcher remain objective throughout the research process (Slife & Williams, 1995). Although researcher reflexivity (which will be discussed in detail) is of greater importance for the qualitative researcher, it is important to ensure that all data is “traceable and confirmable to the original source” (Marks & Dollahite, 2001, p. 633).

Reflexivity is of great importance when conducting qualitative research. Reflexivity is the alternative to confirmability in qualitative research in that it recognizes the impossibility of being 100% objective and thus researchers are encouraged to identify biases and how they may influence the search process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Sussman & Gilgun, 1997). It is vital for qualitative researchers to put aside any conclusions, beliefs, and knowledge based on prior experiences concerning the topic of research (Moustakas, 1994). In an attempt to remain objective the following reflexivity statement details my prior involvement with Native American families, faith beliefs and practices, and my current family structure.

Reflexivity Statement

Growing up in Pawhuska, Oklahoma was a unique experience as it is “Heart of the Osage Nation” and most community events and daily life involved the Osage culture. A unique tapestry of ranchers, oil men, factory workers, and tribal government workers were woven together to create the economic community that still to this day struggles over land and mineral rights and Osage sovereignty. While growing up I had the unique

opportunity to be witness to many storytelling sessions, tribal dinners, honoring ceremonies, braiding and beading gatherings, hand games and dances. What made my childhood even more unique was that my Grandfather was a minister at the Osage Indian Baptist Church in Pawhuska when I was a young girl, and he was highly respected among tribe members and elders. This church was filled with the sights and sounds of Osage life including tribe specific songs and Sunday school stories/lessons. Having gone to school, church and numerous Osage activities and ceremonies with many of my Osage friends I did not come to the realization that I was non-Native until I was in the first grade and one of my Osage friends educated me on our differences. However, these differences did not impact my friendships and involvement with both family and cultural activities. I was a frequent guest to “Indian Camp”, the cultural center of the Osage reservation, and always felt welcome. These early introductions to the Osage people created a foundation of respect and admiration that lives on in me today.

I was raised Baptist from birth and introduced to numerous protestant faiths through my grandfather’s ministry. This ministry included numerous churches throughout Oklahoma, as well as the two Chapels of Peace that my grandfather helped to create. These Chapels of Peace were semi-trailers converted into small, narrow chapels and stationed at large truck stops in order to provide ministry to traveling truckers. My grandparents and parents were active in their faith practices throughout my childhood. These experiences provided me with a foundation of faith that exists within me to this day.

On this foundation I have married a man of similar faith and started a family (consisting of two sons) whom we will raise with similar beliefs and practices.

Throughout our marriage we have continuously relied on our shared spiritual beliefs and religious practices to guide our behavior and decision making. Prayer and scripture devotion has helped in teaching us better communication skills and has kept our commitment to one another strong.

My husband is a member of the Cherokee tribe (adopted Shawnee). He is like many people who mark themselves as Native American on surveys and other forms of racial documentation by agencies and researchers who self-identify as Native American by blood quantum and not necessarily cultural involvement. He was raised in rural Oklahoma, miles away from tribal cultural centers or reservations, and with very little influence of Native American ways. Lack of financial resources to frequent tribal grounds was a contributing factor. By both physical and lifestyle appearances he would be viewed by most to be Caucasian. Our children will also be documented Cherokee adopted Shawnee Indians. Our intention is to expose them to the cultural beliefs and practices of this tribe, as well as those of other tribes. I will pass down stories that I was told by Osage elders and friends, they will attend church services with various tribe specific congregations, and will be exposed to a variety of Native American ceremonies and dances.

As I began my academic journey as a Ph.D. student at Louisiana State University and became immersed in the existing research in the family sciences it became increasingly evident that little existed on strong, highly religious Native American families that contributed to their congregation and cultural community as did the ones with whom I had grown up. In addition, I was shocked with how many of my friends and fellow students perceived Native Americans in a stereotypically negative fashion as they

are often portrayed in movies of the Old West and were unaware that Native Americans practiced many of the same faith practices that they themselves had embraced. It is the purpose of this dissertation to help illuminate the existence of these families and their unique qualities and strengths. This illumination is intended not only to provide a new depth of education for research in the area, but also provide important information concerning family beliefs, values, and strengths to those working directly with this specific population.

My close, personal experiences with the Osage people have provided me with a level of sensitivity and awareness of the unique family dynamics and religious beliefs and practices of this tribe. However, it is important to note that my being non-Native limited my access, experience, and perceptions of Osage life. I am after all, an outsider looking in and do not pretend to understand “being Native”. I am also aware of the biases I hold regarding the positive influence of faith in the lives of individuals and families. It is a goal of this study not to overlook negative influences of faith, indeed, questions addressing challenges and potential negatives were intentionally included in the study and related data will be reported.

Data Analysis

Following the transcription of each interview, I simultaneously listened to the audio-recorded interview and read the interview transcript. This exercise provided the opportunity to correct any portions of the interview that were transcribed incorrectly or were found to be inaudible during the transcription process. The process of open coding was used to identify concepts and themes within each interview (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; 1998). Codes were created and organized into a table for easy reference. Numeric

content analysis (counting the frequency of concepts) and axial coding (grouping concepts into themes) was used following the initial open coding process. Major themes are considered the most salient of themes and were constructed from this process and quotes from participants were organized under each to use as data in the findings section and to demonstrate the meaning of narratives.

Peer debriefing took place to increase credibility. A qualitative researcher and former fellow graduate student, working in her first year as Assistant Professor read five transcribed interviews and performed open coding. Once her open coding was completed we discussed the coding together and compared our interpretations and themes.

CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore the cultural and faith experience of highly religious, Native American, married couples in relation to their marital relationship, parent/child relationship, and coping. During qualitative interviews numerous topics were discussed by the participants. The most frequent of these were made into approximately ten themes, each with supporting data. The five themes presented for this paper are the most salient and representative. While reading this chapter it is important to note that the word “faith” was introduced by the participants. When discussing their Native American beliefs and practices they used the word “culture” or “ways”. At the end of each theme a brief discussion of how the contents of the theme could influence the outcome of a healthy, enduring marriage (X) will be presented. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identity of participants.

Faith and Culture: “They go hand in hand.”

The first theme is very important in understanding all aspects of life for the participants. In studying how their faith and culture influence aspects of their family life it is vital to acknowledge that their faith and culture overlap in such a way that it is difficult to separate religious traditions, values, beliefs, teachings, etc. from those that are culturally based. While there are culturally specific practices and faith specific practices, neither is without the influence of the other. This was communicated throughout the interviews and became a major theme. This theme is organized into three sub-themes: 1) “To understand our culture they have to understand the faith its built on”, 2) Integration of Culture in Church Services, and 3) Prayer in Traditions: “He’s really going to hear it”.

“To understand our culture they have to understand the faith it is built on”

Participants discussed how their faith and culture were interconnected. Henry, a 45 year old father of two explains how interconnected they actually are.

Our culture kind of overlaps the faith or interacts with the other so to understand our culture they have to understand the faith that it's built on.

When asked how her faith and culture influence one another, Mali, a 60 year old mother of three replied, “I just feel like they go hand and hand anymore.”

John similarly adds:

Your religion, being Baptist or whatever, you carry it over to the Indian side because basically it is the same thing.

Ayita, a 61 year old mother and grandmother, discusses how her mother reinforced the idea that her faith was just as important as her culture and why she was required to go to church.

My mom always said you have to be a good Christian to understand the Indian because it is so side-by-side.

Brad discusses how he shared with his children the idea of balance and harmony that leans on his spiritual and cultural beliefs.

Basically brought them up subscribing to the same theory of harmony that I do. That is basically when you are at peace with your elements, when you are at peace with your God, then you have harmony with your surroundings and your elements. And unless you are in harmony, things will not go your way. You can just try as you may but it will not go your way because you are not at harmony. So that is a culmination of spiritual and cultural.

As you can see from these excerpts, participants felt that their culture and their faith were interconnected. It is important to note that many of the participants talked about both faith and cultural beliefs while answering questions regarding just faith, or just culture. Faith and culture are not easily separated for these participants. It is important to

note that when asked questions regarding only faith, answers were often given in discussion of cultural aspects of life, and vice versa. These participants live in such a way that their lives are not fragmented into faith and culture. They are so blended it is nearly impossible for them to describe one without the other. This may be a result of the position these participants hold concerning the mutual validity of Native American spirituality and Christianity (Forbes, 2000). Since each are viewed as equally important and there has been a mixing of traditions for generations. When asked, “Are there any challenges that arise between your religious beliefs and your cultural beliefs?” all of the participants said no and explained that they were the same.

Integration of Culture in Church Services

The majority of the couples attend protestant churches where the congregation consisted of mostly Native American members and in some cases the church was tribe specific (i.e. Osage Indian Baptist Church). The participants felt that those services were more powerful due to the fact that they included tribal language in sermons and hymns, tribal dress, and fellow tribe members. Anna discusses her experience with a tribe specific congregation and how it was made more special by including her tribal language and tribal hymns.

All the singing is in Creek. All the preaching is in Creek and repeated in English. Those things go back a long time. Back to the 1800’s the way they been doing it. I guess the special things to me are those that are combined with those traditions. They’re pretty much the way everyone else does it. It was Baptist but they had that little adaptation they can fit it to your tribe.

Winona also gets more from church services with tribal songs as she explains when asked if it makes a difference in her spiritual journey to be part of a Native American congregation.

It does to me because I grew up in a United Methodist Indian church, I grew up with the songs that were sung. They were Creek songs. The church I went to a majority of the people were Creek. I grew up with those songs and once I got away from church and didn't go for a period of time and when [Paul] and I were looking for a church I missed the songs I grew up with and I had kind of a longing in my heart for them and I kept telling [Paul] that I'd really like to go back to church but I'd like to go back to an Indian church. Mine was for the summer. So when we went to [church] the first time they had different tribes there. They had Kiowa, Creek, Choctaw, Cherokee, so you were able to hear like four different tribal songs and even though the ones that were different from my tribe I enjoyed them so much and felt a lot of the spiritualism in my heart just from hearing them so it was important for me for that reason. The songs were very uplifting songs too.

When asked, "Which of your religious beliefs have the most influence on your family life?", Dena shares that attending church services with Osage traditions incorporated is very important. She goes on to share how the Non-Native American Priest who attempts to "understand the culture" is including aspects of Osage tradition is:

Because the priest here at the Catholic Church is really trying to bring that Osage tradition into the church. Instead of smoking and burning incense, he's burning cedar. Sometimes he'll wear moccasins and sometimes he'll ask kids to dress in their Indian clothes at midnight mass.

As Anna, Winona, and Dena share, the inclusion of their tribal ways in church services help them gain more from their church services. From these narratives it seems as though the participants find comfort in "tailor-made" services that allow them to express their faith in such a way that they believe God intended for their tribe. This seemed to add a deeper meaning to the teachings of the services. This inclusion of culture in church makes a marked impact on their faith experience by connecting them to their tribal language and ways given to them by their creator that have been suppressed by outside influences.

Prayer in Traditions: “He’s really going to hear it”

All of the participants were active in their traditional cultural activities and discussed how their protestant faith is a vital part of those traditions. Eli states that the tradition of In-lon-shka, a gathering that takes place each June, holds special meaning for his family and is not just a dance.

Our In-lon-shka, besides cultural it’s faith based too. Especially our Sundays. Our Sundays are kind of like our church for our districts.

His wife Mary adds:

See those are prayer songs and I really don’t see any separation between the June dances and mass.

Charles, a 75 year old husband, father, grandfather, and great grandfather who is a respected elder in the community shares:

Everything that is during that time, everything that we do, the start of everything, we always start with a prayer and I guess all of those songs that they sing during our dances, all of those songs are more or less prayer songs.

Paula, Charles’ wife also shares:

We pray before each activity. Anything we have we pray before and we pray after. Like if it’s an Indian activity or dances they have and a lot of fellowship goes into it and a lot of people will give a testimonial about faith.

Steven, a 58 year old father of one shares his belief that the songs and dances were gifts from God:

I always think that those things are extra special because that is what God gave us a long time ago in the beginning of time and we still have them. My way of thinking is that when we do those things, like our tribe, He’s really going to hear it. He’s really going to see it and He’s going to like it. We’re still doing it the way He gave it to us.

Ayita, a 61 year old mother and grandmother talks about prayer songs:

We have prayer songs. It's just when you get down there, you just let yourself go and relax and let it fill you. Then it is good. It's a wonderful thing. They pray about everything. They even have a half-breed song so if you aren't Indian or your half Sack and Fox and half something else then you have to get up and it is like a silly square dance or something and it is a prayer song for them. There are some very serious songs in there. They have a stress song, they have a travel song. It's just wonderful.

These participant's cultural activities are faith based and are yet another way in which they express their beliefs and communicate with God. Participants felt that their dancing and singing was a special gift from God and that in doing these things they were praising him in the manner he intended for their people. Several participants wanted to make it clear that their dances were not acts of worshiping idols. They may be doing an eagle or sun dance, but they are not worshiping the eagle or the sun. Instead, they are thanking God, the Grandfather, for those things. They are praising God for his creations, his blessings. As Dena explains that she believes her ancestors have always worshiped God, however, they knew him as Grandfather.

Just because we say Grandfather doesn't mean we don't believe in God. A long time ago there used to be a wise [creator] and they didn't know who "God" was a long time ago, [but] they knew there was a supreme being so that's what they called him, Grandfather. He was the wise person, the creator.

As seen in the narratives of the above sub-themes, there is little separation between faith and culture for these participants and that needs to be considered as the findings section continues. Once again, it is important to remember that these participants are not members of The Native American Church; they are Christian (Protestant and Catholic).

The interconnectedness of faith and culture is viewed (B) as a strength (C) by these participants. This positive view of the blend of tribal ways and Christian faith may

increase the perceived (B) accessibility of resources (C) provided by both the cultural and faith communities. Church services and cultural traditions hold special meaning (B) for these participants. The unique blending of cultural and faith beliefs and practices appear to increase the depth of meaning (B) in those experiences for these participants. This provides couples with a feeling (B) of being more connected to God and their tribal ways (C), both provide rich resources for facing life's challenges (A) and may increase the couple's ability to navigate challenges (A) in such a way as to become more adaptive and resilient (X).

Influence of Faith and Culture on Marriage

For these couples shared faith and culture were highly influential in their marriage. This theme is divided into three subthemes, 1) "Common [Sacred] Ground, 2) Ephesians 5:1: "It's an understanding", and 3) Faith and Commitment: "If you think you're leaving, you're taking me with you".

"Common [Sacred] Ground"

10 out of the 15 couples stated that sharing similar backgrounds of faith and culture was a source of strength in their marriage. Mary stated that having similar faith and cultural beliefs and practices provided, "common ground" for the marriage. Many of the couples intentionally selected a mate with similar cultural and faith backgrounds and some even believed God put them together because of their similarities as Mona, married for ten years shares, "He brought [us] together because we had very similar upbringings."

Rena, married for 11 years, explains how picking a marital partner with similar background helps avoid conflict:

We picked each other because we had similar backgrounds and similar value systems so a lot of that [conflict] was eliminated by picking someone with the same value system.

Rena continues by adding:

It's hard enough to get two people to go in the same direction and then if you don't have your same faith, which to me your faith should be what your core value system is and if they are different that's going to be a hard job to get you to go in the same direction if you have your basic values are so different.

Gloria, married for 19 years adds that by sharing common background they eliminated the added stress of having to explain their faith and cultural beliefs and practices:

We didn't have to explain it for our relationship. It was just there because we did grow up the same, with the same background. It was understood and it wasn't me having to learn something different and accept it.

Husbands also shared how having similar backgrounds benefit their marital relationship.

Harold, married for 42 years shares how similar beliefs help define marital expectations:

From a cultural point of view I recognize my role from a cultural point of view. She recognizes her role from a cultural point of view. We've always cooperated in everything we've ever done throughout our whole marriage. We've always agreed on what we were going to do. There was little conflict.

Sharing a common foundation for marriage was discussed numerous times as an important factor for a strong marriage, as Henry, married for 19 years discusses how similar backgrounds helps build a strong foundation:

I would say if you are lucky to share the same culture that's a big plus. I think most Indians are grounded in their culture and their faith and their families. Our tribe is like that and our culture and from what we have heard all the other Indian tribes and cultures center around their families. Once you get away from that is kind of when you run into problems.

Both husbands and wives felt that sharing similar faith and cultural backgrounds helped strengthen their marriage and avoid problems they felt couples without “common ground” were likely to address.

Ephesians 5: “It’s an understanding”

When presented with the question, “Do you feel there are any religious practices that if misunderstood or misapplied could be harmful to the marriage?”, many of the wives mentioned Ephesians 5:1 and discussed how it could be taken too far by some and lead to abuse, or contradicts the modern view of an independent woman. However, none of the participants disagreed with the scripture and instead communicated that they had accepted it as a guide for their role as wife. Anna, a 55 years wife of 35 years, shares her take on the scripture:

I know a lot of women now days have problems with that statement, ‘women submit yourself to your husband’. I look at that as not really submission, but as helping. A helper to [Steven], where he is the head of the household and he is the one responsible for the household and the Lord looks down on him as being the head of the household. Since I am submissive to the Lord than I am also to my husband.

In response to the same question, Joe, married for 21 years brought up the passage and discussed how he interpreted the scripture:

Ephesians 5 where it says to submit. Wives submit to their husbands. That could be blown way out of proportion, but in my opinion and all the different versions or interpretations I’ve heard of it’s not really a submission as it is a get to. As a team that team is only going to win if you do your part. And vice a versa. That’s all there is to it.

His wife Judy added:

It’s an understanding. We used to tease each other about that. I can see myself getting really upset about it and I’m like wait because we submit to each other all the time without knowing. It’s about the love that we have for each other.

Tallulah, a 52 year old wife of 30 years discusses her religious belief in the hierarchy of marriage:

I think the hierarchy of marriage is God, husband. I think the husband should be the head of the household and then the family.

Tallulah continued later in the interview:

God, head of household, husband and then family. If we follow that, things just fall into place. If you don't follow that, a lot of times you have problems.

This idea of submission and hierarchy of marriage is also displayed in the spousal roles during traditional tribal activities such as dinners and dances where women traditionally prepare the meal, serve the men, and make sure the men have all they need to appropriately participate in the activities. Steven discusses his wife, Anna's role:

Anna supports me in those things. She goes with me and she makes sure that we have everything we need to do it in a good way and she helps me to conduct myself in a good manner and helps me to get ready and I present myself in a good manner. It means more, a lot more to me that she is there.

Joe also discusses the role expectations during tribal activities:

We both believe the same way and we understand that the men have to do certain things and the women have to do certain things. That's what we do. I don't question why she has to do what she does and she doesn't question why I have to do what I have to do. Even though we are doing separate individual things it's still a part of a bigger thing we do together over all.

In the following narrative, Gloria, a wife and mother of two young boys, discusses the challenge of being a strong, independent woman in the workforce and a submissive partner at home and during tribal activities:

I guess in this day and time it is kind of hard because, you know. My mom was very independent and I hope I am somewhat. Very strong willed and about equality. However, my husband is the head of the household and I give him that respect but it's a joint effort. I have a lot of respect for him

and his place in our family but I also know that he needs me. I need him. That kind of deal. But, [during our tribal activities] it's very different from the way I live in my work, especially in my line of work where I am over a lot of males in the construction world. I'm telling these guys here's what you are doing, here's when you are going to get it done and here's when you are going to get paid. That is interesting from a male dominated industry to have a female come into that role and do that and I feel like you do have to be somewhat strong in order to make it work and in order to get my job done I have to do that. On the other hand [during our tribal activities], I accept it and that's kind of what you do, but out there I know I'm going to be serving these guys. [My husband] loves it. He's real good about it. We joke about it but I don't mind because that is what it is. For some reason that's just not questioned and I'm one of those people that question a lot. Why do we have to do this and why do we have to do that? Out there that's just what we do. The males have certain roles and you know that and you respect that the way it is. I don't think I am any less of a person or anything like that. It's just the way it is.

Respect amongst spouses is a prominent characteristic of these couples. Support for one another and a show of respect for their partner is important. This respect is mentioned most during discussions of the roles each spouse has during traditional tribal activities. Mona discusses how respect is important in her marriage:

I'm taking care of him and I know without me asking he respects that and honors me in life throughout the year because I'll take care of him and I'll get the things done that he needs done so he can serve his guest or his family. I honor him by making sure his things are taken care of in his camp. I serve him in that it's respect. I respect him and respect what he does. I appreciate what he does so that we can have that. So most definitely respect and honoring him. That's something when I committed to him for the rest of my life, love, honor and obey. I love him and I honor him. I don't necessarily obey him. [During our traditional tribal activities] I have to abide by the rules out there and there are a lot of things that you have to sacrifice but it's not a sacrifice to me because it's giving back to him and making sure that his camp is well taken care of. It ensures that he doesn't have to worry about anything.

Respect is also mentioned as a way to avoid conflict as discussed by Steven:

I just get the idea from vows and from the beginning and traditional religious beliefs that man is suppose to love and protect and care for and provide for the family as best you can. So as far as conflict, that is what I

am trying to do the best that I can to show my love and respect and care and protection and all those things for our family, for my wife.

Winona discusses how honor and respect help her keep the marriage going.

I think that honor and respect, just mutual respect for each other and a great deal of maintaining or keeping the marriage going. It's hard for us at times to keep that in mind. When life gets in the way and like all couples, after your married so many years if you don't have the fight or arguments or whatever then something is wrong with your marriage. And we have those moments, believe me. Then I have to go back and remind myself that the basis for my marriage was honor and respect for Paul and when I cross those boundaries and don't do that then you know your marriage can get in trouble. And I never want my marriage to dissolve. I made a commitment to God and I honor that to God and to Paul. That's what I try to keep utmost in my mind.

Winona later shares advice to other married couples on avoiding conflict by remembering to honor and respect their spouse:

I would just say to keep the honor and respect utmost in your mind. Try to remember why you took your vows. I think you should just honor and respect everyone but the person that you chose to marry, well sometime we treat strangers better than our spouses or our family. We forget that that is our family. Those are our loved ones. Everyone deserves honor and respect.

The submission discussed in Ephesians 5 is often a source of heated debate among spouses. However, for these participants, as seen in the above narratives, the scripture supports the cultural expectations of the wife acting as a helper to her husband who is the head of household. The discussion of these gender role expectations were presented with humor and loving sarcasm by both husbands and wives. While in mainstream society these gender roles may not be accepted, these participants have reported a reciprocated respect for their spousal roles. This “understanding” of roles reportedly strengthens their marital relationship.

Faith and commitment: “If you think you’re leaving, You’re taking me with you.”

Commitment to one’s spouse was a recurring theme in the interviews. This focus on commitment was communicated while discussing how their faith beliefs influenced their marital relationship and included discussion of vows, God as part of the marriage, and how their faith helped them get through hard times.

Many of the couples discussed how taking their vows seriously helped them stay committed to the marriage even through tough times. Lydia, wife of 39 years discusses how she took those vows seriously:

It’s kept us together. Because we took our vows seriously. We cling to one another, in sickness and in health. In good attitude and bad attitude. We stuck it out. We took the vows seriously.

Rena discusses some of the hardships that she and her husband have endured and how her commitment to her marriage and their shared faith has helped their marriage endure through those tough times.

We believe marriage is forever. We said that from the very beginning. If you think you’re leaving, you’re taking me with you. We’ve been married 11 years and those 11 years we’ve lost his parents, my grandmother, and my uncle. He lost a job, we had 3 children. I had 2 surgeries. 9/11 happened. In 2001 we just had all sorts of things happen. We had babies, we moved, we sold a house, his father remarried. We have had just a lot of ups and downs and I think had we not been a faith based couple that might not have worked out so well.

In the following narrative Steven shares how his vows were not just between him and his wife, but also with God and what those vows have meant in his marriage:

Well, you know, when we took our marriage vows we came before God saying that we were going to...the vows that we took, for better for worse, for richer for poorer we took that seriously and as we were going along through our married life there were a lot of things that happened like when we were sick we took care of each other. We cope with that and a lot of times we had to look to the Lord to help us, [during] times of trouble, worries, something like that. With us you know, we just took it seriously.

Steven goes on to discuss how his faith belief that being married makes you become one with your spouse has influenced his behavior as a marital partner:

I know when we got married according to God we are like one so I try to do, not really great at it, but what I try to do is remember us as one. Try not to be so selfish.

Faith beliefs such as the presence of God in their lives also influenced the level of commitment felt by the couples. Paul, 50 years old and married for 10 years, mentions how some other truckers behave “on the road” and he communicates how his belief that God is always with him helps him to remain committed and maintain his fidelity.

It’s really [good to] get to know your Lord, get saved, whatever it is because I see all these guys out here away from their wives thinking no one is seeing what is going on and doing stuff behind their backs and I think, “God, that is sad that has to be like that.” I just thank God that I love my wife and I know that it’s wrong. Yes my wife might not find out about it immediately but God knows right then what you are doing. It’s just choosing to believe that God is always present. That’s just helped me be strong out on the road.

The presence of God in the marital relationship was discussed often as a major strength that couples relied on to get them through hard times. Ayita discusses how God helps her marriage:

Oh my goodness. He was always there every day. That’s just it. When we was going through hard times I just asked for the strength to get through [the hard times] and to forgive.

Tallulah also discusses how God helps her thirty year marriage remain strong.

Without God, I don’t think you can hold a marriage together because there are times we hit a hard spot or something and God was our salvation. He was always our way to work through things and without him we would fall apart.

There was a strong belief communicated by the participants that God was a major part of the marriage and some believed that marriage could not succeed without him.

Paula states, if you don't have God in your life, you don't have a marriage."

Couples also felt that their faith beliefs help them get through hard times by reducing conflict as we see with Mona in her response to the question, "Are there ways that your practices or beliefs help avoid or reduce conflict?"

Reduce, maybe, because I really feel like God would never give you anything that you can't handle or get through. So if you really just think about it everything will get resolved in it's own time. As long as you have faith in one another and your Creator, then most definitely. It's kept us together. As long as you have faith, it will work itself out.

Couples also discussed the importance of faith practices, such as church attendance and prayer, in their marital relationship. Michael discusses how going back to church helped him keep his ten year marriage going.

Actually I think it kind of kept us together because I wasn't going [to church for a while]. I had quit participating and we were just going through a real tough time and I finally decided [to go]. A couple of things happened that made me want to go back. When I started going back things started getting better between both of us. We may not be together if we hadn't started going back. I know we probably wouldn't be sitting here.

The practice of prayer was also a major source of strength for these couples in their lives and will be discussed numerous times in this chapter. Here are a few examples of how prayers reportedly influenced the marital relationships of these couples.

Paula discusses having prayer throughout her 54 years of marriage.

When we first got married the priest told us if you pray together, you stay together. We've always tried to do that.

Her husband, Charles also adds how daily prayer influences their marriage.

I think that even in our daily life like at each meal if we have company or even if we don't have company we say grace at the meal. It seems like that keeps us strong in our faith and in our lives that we are serving the Lord the best that we know how. It seems like that just makes us stronger and draws us together.

Martha discusses that she believes that when there is conflict in her marriage that God will not hear her prayers, "It's our prayers [that keep us together]. When we're mad at each other God won't hear our prayers."

It is important to note that while participants felt their shared backgrounds, gender role expectations and ability to lean on God in prayer helped them to reduce and/or avoid conflict in their marriage, they did not discuss any active conflict resolution strategies. The dialogue of Brad and Tallulah below is representative of the passive conflict resolution discussed by many of the participants:

Tallulah: We give it to the Lord. I mean, who are we to settle things.
Brad: Well, we don't dwell on it.
Tallulah: We give our problems to the Lord and he works it out.

To summarize theme two, participants felt (B) that sharing similar faith and cultural backgrounds provided a strong foundation (C) for their marriage. This foundation gave them a shared "understanding" of spousal roles (B & C) that helped to avoid or reduce conflict (X) within their marriages. The participants also reported a high level of commitment (B & C) to their spouse based on both faith and cultural beliefs. Prayer and God as a third partner was a major resource (C) for these couples and provided them with a sense of confidence (B) that they were not alone and could overcome challenges (X). It is important to consider that many of the couples discussed a "give it to God" approach (B & C) to dealing with conflict (A) and they discuss specific conflict resolution strategies (C) that helped them actively deal with marital conflict (A).

Generational Transference: “If you don’t have it, it won’t be there.”

Much of the participants’ lives are focused on the raising of children. Both the faith and the culture of these participants hold parenting as a major responsibility in their lives. Much of life is centered around children and passing on cultural and religious beliefs and practices. Six sub-themes related to children will be shared: (1) “It’s [all about] storytelling,” (2) “Say a little prayer,” (3) “surrogate parents,” (4) “respect your elders,” (5) “follow in our footsteps,” and (6) “find a faith to follow.”

“It’s [all about] storytelling”

Storytelling is used not only to pass along knowledge of tribal ways, but also as an important part of teaching kids lessons and discipline. Participants discuss how they use storytelling in both daily life and during traditional ceremonies to pass down knowledge of tribal ways to their children and grandchildren. Grandparents are a major source of storytelling.

Steven, a 58 year old father of one and respected child educator, talks about how it is expected that children know the ways of their tribe and how those expectations are passed down.

In Kiowa we say it’s a Kiowa life. These are things you get growing up or you acquire. It’s a way that you are supposed to conduct your life in the Kiowa way and they aren’t written down or anything. They’re just taught to you and you are just suppose to know them and when you don’t people let you know about it. They’ll say that’s not the way we do things, those things like that. It’s just a way of life.

Steven later describes how he uses storytelling in everyday situations to pass along his tribal ways.

Things just pop up where you can make little comments about who you are and how your people were and still are to this day. That’s just kind of continuous, all the time.

Paul, a 50 year old father of three, discusses how he uses storytelling during tribal gatherings and ceremonies to explain the ways of his people to his children, and now his grandchildren.

Sometimes when they do things I will go back to the stories I have been told and help them understand that belief or why it's done that way. Just through story telling because the Cherokees are the only ones that had anything written down and they didn't even do that until after the Whites had come. Long after. So everything in both of our tribal lives has been handed down through stories. Words vocally, not written.

Paul continues and discusses how Grandparents are more successful in sharing stories.

During that PowWow I was able to sit my grandkids down and point things out that people were doing and [tell them] why they were doing it and hoping they will remember that. [It] may not be tomorrow, but later in their life they will see it done and say, "Hey, my granddad told me what that was." I remember a lot of stories that my grandfather told me. I remember some from my dad and mother and all, but I guess the stories from my grandfather were more meaningful because he had more patience with us. He could sit and wait for us to finish fidgeting around so I was always listening when he was talking.

Although storytelling references were primarily from men, some women mentioned this tradition as well. Ayita, mother of three, explains how she is passing on the stories her mother told her to her grandchildren.

My mom was a great storyteller. She would get us to wash dishes and she would start telling us stories about her grandpa and now when I get my grandson in the car I start telling him about those stories.

Gary discusses how he tells his three children the stories about his elders so that they appreciate the importance of elders.

[I remind them], just remember who you are and where you came from. [I believe in] realizing and appreciating the impact he had on who I am. That's the same with the children. Daily I remind them of their grandparents on both sides, and so forth. They know who [their elders were] and they'll know who their grandparents are that have gone before.

That's just something that if you listen to anyone in the Indian culture talk, it's [all about] storytelling. I know my father told many [stories] as well.

"Say a little prayer"

Participants communicated that they prayed for and with their children as a way to share their faith and as a tool for raising their children by asking God for help when they were unable to be there or when it was beyond their control to protect their children. Prayer was reportedly a major support for these parents. When asked how she shared her faith with her children Martha stated, "First it would be when they heard us pray. We taught them how to pray."

Paul and Winona, parents of three, discuss how they share their faith with their children by praying with them and encouraging them to talk with God. Winona begins:

Like in storytelling with the grandkids. Talking to my daughters and trying to guide them as much as I can. Praying with them. Talking to them about God. Just trying to be helpful in any way I can in their life. Trying to give them guidance as much as I can.

Winona's husband Paul adds:

I tried to do the same when they are having problems that come up in their life and they think it's the end of the world to them. I've tried to tell them it's not the end of the world. They just need to take a minute out and speak with God. Thru some way He will make it work out whether it's against them or in their favor. Hopefully it's in their favor, but if it's not that's the way it's supposed to be and they can't dwell on it.

Tallulah, mother of three, discusses how she relies on prayer and faith that God will watch over her children when they face difficulties that she cannot protect them from.

One of the hardest things to do as a parent, [as] you find out is to let them take those licks. You just have to back off and say, 'Okay Lord, do your work'. As much as I hate it, go ahead. It's hard.

Tallulah also discusses how she prayed with their children as a way to help guide them in making the right decision, sharing her faith that God would lead them to the right decision. She shares this conversation she had with one of her children.

Our oldest called us a couple months ago and he was still looking for his residency. He was doing an internship but was still trying to find his residency and he was telling us about this one offer he got and talking about it and when we finished up we said, “Son, let’s pray about it and the Lord will open it to you. Whichever way it needs to go, let’s just pray about it,” and that’s just the way we left it.

Mary, mother of two, discusses how she has taught her children to pray and how her children will ask her to pray with them and for them so that God will help them through their times of need, no matter how simple.

[Prayer], that’s what the girls know. Before something always say a little prayer and then after it’s done always say a little prayer thanking God for getting your through it. They know that. My oldest one will say, Mama, I have a test coming up or I’m on my way to a test,” she says, “pray for me.” And I say, “Honey, I do that all the time.”

Anna shares her experience of how praying for her young adult son while he is out from under her wing has helped her feel as though God is protecting him and guiding him while he is out on his own.

There are some things as a mother with me, I always had prayers for [our son], for his safety, being down there in that area where there are so many people and traffic and everything. Each and every day I pray for traveling mercy for him because of all of the traffic that goes on. Or whenever he is out driving coming back here and I [have] seen where things could happen, like he hydroplaned that one time and messed up his car but it didn’t injure him. I always think of that as answered prayers because he was protected. He did not get hurt. Messed up his car but he didn’t get hurt. [I lean on] prayer for him as far as a job and pray for someone to come into his life to love him.

As seen in these narratives, prayer provided parents with a source of strength, guidance and protection. These parents passed the act and belief of prayer on to their

children by teaching them how to pray and praying with their children. These parents also communicated to their children that God was a protector. They did not present God as a punitive being, instead they presented him as a wise elder who was loving, kind and wise.

“Surrogate parents”

Parents relied on their congregation, or church family for support in raising their children and communicated that while many of their fellow church members were in fact family, those that were not related by blood were members of their tribe and considered extended family who aid in the raising their children. Joe states, “I think our church family, they’re surrogate parents. They can do things that I can’t.”

Many of the participants attend churches where much of their family and extended family also attend. Their congregations include many of their immediate family members and extended family. Gloria explains that going to church with her family surrounds her children with love.

[Our congregation] is important because it’s part of our life. It’s a central part of our life. It’s something that I can do with my husband and my boys. Not only can they be around us to worship and do what we do, but they are around their grandparents, their aunts and uncles. It encompasses not only our immediate family but everyone and we are all doing the same thing and they are around people that they love and love them. We are there for such a good reason. It’s a big part of our life. It’s what we do.

Many participants felt their children could go to church and find guidance among trusted members of the congregation as Dena discusses.

Well, it’s just that they know they can go to the church and get guidance. The kids do know they can get guidance there and be closer to God.

Rena provides an example of the comfort of a church family:

It really has been a church family. A body of Christ. Family night dinner we usually go on Wednesday nights and one night I was standing there talking with some other ladies and trying to keep up with [my son] and I see him run off and somebody [else] runs behind him [to make sure he is safe] and I started to go [too], and the girl I was talking to said, “Let her do it, she wants to and that’s what we’re here for,” and it is. It’s so nice to know that if I lose a child someone will help find him.

Participants shared that their religious congregation was an important resource for sharing some of the responsibility and stress of child-rearing. These congregation members were referred to as family regardless of kinship.

“Respect your elders”

Elders and grandparents play a pivotal role in the raising of children. Children are expected to show a great deal of respect for their elders as they are pillars of the tribal community. Brad explains how children showing respect to elders by being quiet and listening is a cultural expectation for all young children.

The cultural practices in the native tradition [are that] first and foremost, you’re taught to respect your elders. Another thing is (and more young people need to know this) be quiet and listen. I’ve always told my kids, you know what, anytime someone will take their time to teach you something you need to take the time to learn it, because what you already know you know, but what they’re about to teach you, you need to know. So respect, listening, that’s a gift. Too many people are running their mouth. [This interferes with] the gift of listening and learning. So respect for your elders. Hear and [have] reverence.

Further, children are taught to treat their elders as family member, as Paula explains.

We were just taught to show respect and when you have elders that are real close to you, you call them Aunt and Uncle.

Ayita shares how as a busy parent she was unable to do some of the things she can now do with her grandchildren that are important.

I’m a lot smarter about the grandkids now than I was about the kids. There are things that I want [my grandson] to know that maybe I didn’t

tell the kids. Maybe I tried to tell the kids, but now I know there are things I want to tell my grandkids. We were just busy raising kids.

Paul also feels his role as a grandparent is important in helping fill the gaps that his children are unable to.

I think a lot of parents now days get caught up in, “I got to be at work at this time, I get off work at this time. When I get home all I want to do is really relax a little bit and then go [out].” But with that little bit of relaxation, they could spend a little time with their kids. It would take their mind off their workday just like it would if they sit on the couch and watch the news. I think that as grandparents that’s where we step in. As I was telling you before, we gain more patience. You gain more patience with your grandchildren than you do with your children. It’s mixed up. It should be the other because you want your kids to be close to you, but it’s usually your grandkids.

Elders also benefit from the respect that is expected from children due to the closeness it creates between child and elder, as Paula shares.

When I was growing up my mother would say to respect your elders and that was just kind of instilled in us and that was a good teaching. [It] makes you feel better and makes them feel better too, that closeness.

As seen in the above narratives, the inclusion of elders in a child’s life is very important to the participants. Elders provide an invaluable education of religious beliefs and tribal ways through wisdom and patience that parents are sometimes unable or unwilling to provide. These narratives demonstrate the vital role elders have in the lives of Native American families. Elders are considered the guardians of wisdom and knowledge (Renault & Freke, 1996). Their patience and love for the children can be an asset for busy parents.

“Follow in our footsteps”

Participants communicated a strong desire for their children to follow their example and be active in their cultural traditions. While it was also important for their

children to follow their example of faith, it was less important for their children to practice that faith in a specific denomination. Lydia discusses why she feels it is important that her children and grandchildren continue to practice their tribal ways.

I think that's an important part of their heritage to participate in that kind of stuff. It keeps that part of the world alive. I think that is important.

Mona, mother of two, discusses the importance of teaching children not only tribal ways, but to be strong leaders so that the tribe benefits from them.

Teach your children. Carry on those traditions, especially if they are a member [of the tribe]. If you don't have it, it won't be there. That's what I remember about the ceremonial grounds, teach your children. Then teach your children anything you can academically, education wise. Teach them so they can grow up to be leaders of their community and be strong.

Joe, father of four, shares just how important it is for his children to continue practicing their tribal ways.

If they want to remain part of the family that is very important because if they don't they are out of place when they come out to the [ceremonial grounds].

While Joe is very passionate about his children following in his ways, other participants reported that while it was very important for their children to continue their tribal traditions, it was not something that could be forced. Winona, mother of three, explains her view:

It's important but you can't force anyone to do anything. I just try to be an example and if they want to ask or have an interest in it then they will come to me and ask me about it. I can't force my kids to go anything.

Her husband Paul adds how making it fun is an important part of ensuring that future generations will continue the traditions.

When I'm wanting them to learn certain things like when we go to a powwow or whatever it is we do in our culture, I want to make it fun for

the grandkids, my kids, so they'll remember it and want to go back to continue learning that way.

Participants described a desire for their children to keep their tribal traditions alive. Children are responsible for carrying on tribal ways for future generations. This desire for them to follow in their footsteps is not just so the children will know their ways, but it is also to benefit the tribe, thereby keeping the tribe alive. However, not all tribal ways are shared with all children. Some participants communicated that their elders would not pass along knowledge of tribal ways if they believed the adult child was not or would not live in accordance with tribal ways. Elders are also reluctant to share knowledge of tribal beliefs and practices if the beliefs and practices could be burdensome on the younger generation. Participants discussed this regarding certain mourning traditions that were not often practices any longer due to the burden of not attending other tribal ceremonies and activities during the long mourning process. Details on these mourning practices were not relayed in detail as participants had only a limited knowledge of the practices.

Children should “find a faith to follow.”

When asked if it was important if their children followed in their faith most of the participants communicated a desire for their children to have faith, although denomination was less important. This lack of concern for denominational loyalty differs greatly from existing research on parents from other cultures and faiths regarding children's denominational loyalty where parents express a deep concern for such loyalty (Dollahite & Marks, 2009; personal communication with Dr. Loren Marks, November 2009). Brad feels that sharing his faith with his children is a calling from God, yet does not mention denomination as part of that calling.

That is probably our biggest challenge, our biggest commission on Earth is to ensure the salvation and ensure that our children are Christians.

Harold, father of three, similarly explains:

To me it's not important that my children follow in my faith, it's important that they find a faith to follow.

Paul adds:

I don't believe it is really important that they follow in my faith or my choice religion as far as Methodist or Catholic or whatever but I feel it's important that they know there is a higher power that has us here on Earth and it doesn't matter what they call this higher power, just knowing they have the belief in Him and knowing that I do too. That's all I can ask for.

Mali explains that she would prefer her three children to follow her example and become members of the Catholic church, yet what is most important is that her children find a personal relationship with God. She states:

It's important but I feel like it is more important that should they not want to go to the Catholic church then I at least want them to remember to pray to God; that He is there and that He created all things and that He is.

Dena also feels similarly to Mali:

To me as long as they believe in God that's fine. If they don't want to practice Catholicism that's fine. As long as they know there is a God, then I think they'll be able to choose their own [denomination].

While it was very important for children to believe in God, participants communicated a belief in the scripture that asks for parents to raise their children up in the ways of the Lord as Brad explains his belief in that if you raise your children in your faith and they do not take to it right away they will eventually return to it.

We raised our kids to be individuals. Think for yourself. We nurtured them with education and spiritual tools so that they would be able to decide what is right and what was wrong as a Christian family. If you do your job, you don't expect your kids to not stray a little bit, that would be deceiving yourself of reality. [But] I could give you the scripture [behind] every belief and every rule we had in our family. Raise your child in the

ways of the Lord and he'll grow up and sow a few wild oats, but he'll come back.

Anna also shares how she feels about the importance her young adult son following in her faith and how that process may happen.

Well to me it is [important], but just like anything you can not press upon them or even say, "This is how it is." You can't say you need to be this way. You need to go to church. You need to do this or that. It has to come from the Lord where it opens his heart to where he is going to be receptive to go [to church]. You can try to lead by example the best you can. That is the way I am but I'm not going to say you need to do this or that. He has to make that decision. I'd be so happy if he did follow in the faith but I keep thinking he might go [with] some other affiliation but as long as he believes in God that is good with me.

In review, this third theme focused on how faith and culture influenced child rearing (A). All of the participants are parents and each participant discussed their children frequently throughout the interviews. Children are a major focus of these participants (B), as well as to their faith and tribal communities (C). Parents are provided with support through both their faith and cultural beliefs, traditions, and communities (B & C). While parents play a major role, the raising of children is a group effort (C) and includes grandparents and other non-blood elders (C). Much of the activities (C) for children are geared to passing down tribal ways to the next generation and securing the future for the tribe (A). As these parents report, it is very important (B) that children find a faith to follow that is centered on God, and that they continue learning and living their tribal ways. The couple's shared level of importance (B) of passing along tribal ways and a belief in God will influence their ability to deal with a child marrying outside the culture (A) or outside the denomination (A). For these couples, a child marrying outside the culture could produce a significant level of stress for the family and may lead to a disconnect among family members (X). However, if a child married into or converted to

another denomination these parents would be less likely to experience a high degree of stress (X) due to their focus on faith and not on denomination.

Religious Coping

Participants reported receiving a strong comfort from their faith beliefs and community. Their belief of God as a protector and third partner provides them with strength when dealing with life's challenges. Their faith community provides them with support and encouragement. These supportive aspects of their faith help them to cope through hard times. Theme four will be presented in two sub-themes: (1) "If He brings you to it, He's going to bring you through it" and (2) "They are my brothers and sisters in Christ."

"If He brings you to it, He's going to bring you through it."

Participants reported that having faith that God was always with them acting as a provider and offering guidance. This belief reportedly was a comfort in tough times and gave them strength to endure hardships. As George, age 36 states:

Well, you know if He brings you to it, He's going to bring you through it. There are tough times, but there are always good times after that. You just got to keep looking towards the future, to the bright side....He gives me strength.

The belief that God gives you what you are able to deal with and helps you through the challenge is reiterated by other participants like Judy,

God gives you what you can handle. You can never get through it but with Him. We can't do it on our own. There is no way I would have made it on my own.

Steven shares how he knows God is always with him.

Well, I know He is always watching us. I think, I just feel good that I accepted God in my life and despite all the mistakes I have made in my life and whatever I've done or however much I've neglected Him and

everything. I know He is going to take care of me because He said that He would.

His wife Anna adds that God is always there taking care of them even when they do not feel worthy of his care.

No matter what we did in life as we got older and walked away, still He was there and we always knew He was there and even though we were not worthy of some of the things He did, He was still there for us, taking care of us.

Paul shares how he is able to talk to God and ask for guidance during tough times.

I think for me it helps me, my conversations with God in other words, it helps me to get myself back on the right track. I know my shortcomings and I know that God knows my shortcomings and a prayer that I have with him or her, or whatever God is, that I need help. That I need some guidance and I need some direction and please help me get to the point where I need to be to get through this moment or my life when it's not good.

Paul later adds:

I think that if I didn't believe in God I wouldn't have made it as far as I have in life. There have been times in my life when I have made wrong decision, but with His help and His guidance I've gotten straightened out and He's helped me with every step I took the whole way.

Dena explains how her faith beliefs give her the strength to endure.

Our faith has always told us not to give up. That we have always had to keep going. That we are going to be able to conquer this day and go on to tomorrow.

As seen in these narratives, participants reported that their belief in God and their personal relationship with God helped them to cope with stressful situations and hardships. Their belief that God would not give them more than they could handle provided strength and confidence that they would overcome their difficulties and the desire to push forward.

“They are my brothers and sisters in Christ.”

Participants shared how their church congregation provides them with emotional support. Lydia was provided with emotional support while dealing with the death of her parents.

As an individual, when I lost my mom and dad, my church family came and helped me get over that. They were really good to me. My church family was important at the time of death.

Mali shares how her congregation provides her with various forms of support:

I go to church, pray to God and give thanks to God but there are times when you go to church and you have something in mind, so and so is sick or somebody has a problem, a financial problem or there, I have had a lot of emotional support from people that say, “How’s your family” or “how’s your mom” or “how’s your kids?”. Somebody’s in an accident they’ll come up and they all say, “Can I do anything?” Or they just do it. I get a lot of that I say good feelings from that, that’s how they feel. I try to be supportive of them too.

Mali’s husband Todd adds that it is not simply the congregation giving support because of their religious faith, but also because of their shared tribal ways.

Most of our emotional support comes from congregation but it also comes from the community whether they are Catholic and I think a lot of our support from our family because we are Indian. It goes back to the old ways, not the Catholic Church, not the Baptist church, but just because of the way we were raised. That’s where I think the support comes in. I think that’s where it’s important and not just in the congregation.

Anna adds:

We are really close. As you say, they are my brothers and sisters in Christ so they are there for me spiritually as well as if anything happens they are always there. I can call them and tell them this is what is going on for prayers and even with other members of the congregation if something goes on with them they can call me and know that they can say we need you to make this or that. Could you make dinner for Wednesday night or Thursday night or something like that. I can lean on them as far as anything that could be going on in my family life or whatever. I can lean on them and I know they will be there for me in all ways. I love those people. They’re just; they’re my church family. Like all families we have

our differences and stuff but that's just all families. Sometimes we'll get sort of annoyed with each others because of our ways and such but we say we'll have to get used to this because we have to get along because once we all get up to heaven we'll have to do it so we might as well get along here. But yeah, they are important to me and I just feel real good. They lift me up and make me feel better and I in turn try to do the same thing for them.

While grieving was only discussed by a few of the participants it is important to include that those who did discuss grieving a loved one relayed that the act of having a wake was very helpful. Having their family and friends sit with them and their deceased family member, in their home, from the time of death (or release of body from hospital/morgue) to the moment of burial was a great comfort. Also comforting was their belief that the ancestors were waiting on "the other side" along with the Grandfather.

These participants hold a strong belief that God would not give them more than they could handle provided strength and confidence (B & C) that they would overcome their difficulties (A) and the desire to push forward (B & C). As reported by many of the participants, the congregation is a great source of support (B). These people are considered family members, "brothers and sisters" (B) and help one another through daily stressors (A), hardships (A) and in times of grief (A). These strengths provided by their beliefs and community (B & C) would be beneficial to the process of successfully (X) handling challenges (A) in such a way that it could contribute to a health, enduring marriage (X).

Challenges

"It's not that you have to, it's that you get to."

Participants reported having to sacrifice time to remain active in both their religious and cultural practices. These participants acknowledge that there are some

things they do that others do not, but did not communicate that they felt it was a negative sacrifice.

Joes shares his unique view on the things he sacrifices for his faith.

When [others] look at following Christ, [they think] I'm going to have to give this up, I'm going to have to give that up. But it's just, it's not that you have to. It's that you get to. But they don't understand that concept. To me that is the servant attitude you get. You receive it when you receive Christ.

Lydia shares that giving time to her faith is important even though it might not always be the easy decision.

[I sacrifice] time. If you want to be faithful it takes time. Your time is dedicated for other things. They will want to go do something else. It would be real easy on Sunday morning to just say, "Oh, it's a bright sunny day. Let's go to the lake."

Joyce also shares:

If they want to live their Indian ways then they're going to have to make time for it. It takes up a lot of time.

Mona mentions a few things that others would see them sacrifice due to the time commitment of cultural activities.

They would say that we give up a lot of our social life and then the girls activities. Sports activities. When it comes down to it, this comes before that.

While Steven could not think of anything that he did for God as a sacrifice, he did share how his elders passed down the lesson of putting God first:

I just know that our people of God, especially our leaders, parents, grandparents, they just feel that anything that gets in the way of your faith or your relationship with God, you need to give it up. I know that because I felt that growing up. I felt that from my grandparents, aunts, mom, deacons, everybody.

Participants report that a great deal of time is invested in both faith and cultural activities. This time is viewed as more of an investment into their faith community and tribe than it is as a sacrifice for themselves. They remarked on this time spent as a positive aspect of their life and that only those looking from the outside would view it as a negative.

Living in two worlds

Many of the participants shared that they felt as though they were balancing two different worlds. Gloria shares how her family has worked hard to have more than their parents and now they do not fully fit among their Native American culture or the majority culture.

I'll even say and we've talked about, there are certain things we want for us, the stability now that we are getting in our middle age. We talk about retirement more, where our parents weren't fortunate to have those conversations. It was more like we are just going to work and when we get there we get there. We talk about 401k's and how much we should have. I think [that] some people look at us sometimes different. We joke about this too that sometimes we don't fit in the non-Native American world but we always don't fit in the Native American world at times because some of those people have made comments that we're trying to act white or you're trying to act not [Native American] because we have professional jobs and try to better ourselves. We don't think we are better than anybody. I grew up so poor. I grew up in a one-bedroom house with four kids in the country. [We] had nothing. I think sometimes it is hard for us that even in the Native American world, it's like [others say], "That's neat [that] they do that, but who are they trying to be?" But then they see us dancing and they see us there, and hopefully they do accept us because that's what we do just like what they do. We're just like them in that respect. [But] it's the way it is. I do feel sometimes that because we have chosen to go down the path we go down it's a little hard sometimes.

Gloria goes on to say, "We are just like everybody else," yet her husband Henry disagrees:

But to a lot of Indians we're not. It's still relevant today; most people probably don't realize it. That's what is kind of unique to our situation we

aren't on a reservation so we aren't isolated. I work in Okmulgee so I travel between here and Okmulgee every day and the culture there is just different and it's just 30 minutes away. A lot of the Indians that live in Okmulgee that's their thinking. We live here right outside of Tulsa and it's just a different life than outside on a reservation. We try to balance that between the urban side of Tulsa and living with doing what we want to do but also still not forgetting our other side of being Indian. A lot of people say that we live in two worlds and it's really true. [We] try to balance that where you feel you do what's right and right for your family whether people agree with it or not. That's one of the things we have run into from both sides. That's why they say we are trying to be white because we want to live like this.

Harold discusses how being involved in politics of a predominately White city hinders his involvement in the politics of his tribe.

I worked in the public schools. I was the only Indian administrator in Western Oklahoma. I was involved in a lot on non-Indian stuff. I was an administrator in Lawton Public Schools. I participated in a lot of non-Indian [issues]. We were both involved in the Democratic party here in SW Oklahoma. So we had to make a distinction to what was going to be the cultural part and what was going to be the traditional part of us. The politics of Lawton and the community of Lawton [has their way, and the] Kiowa tribe has their own [way]. You won't fit [them together]. This is a square peg and this is a round peg and there is no way it is going to fit. This doesn't work that way.

Harold goes on to say:

It's hard[er] to be Native than it is non-Native today. To understand and accept Native traditions and practices and parenting and culture. Since about the 1950's when most of us started going to public school we've all been accepted and been a part of football teams and cheerleaders and glee clubs and when we get out in society. I've been a member of Kiwanis and the non-Indian Methodist Churches, church choir. It's harder to understand the Native culture than it is [to understand this one]. I understand this other stuff. I can be a good old boy just like the old farmers down here. I understand all that language because I grew up in it. It's hard to go back and be a Native and understand that part. Can I take this aggressive/progressive attitude that I've learned and take that back into my Native culture? Why are you sitting there? Why don't you get up and go to work? Get up. Not too long ago she says, "How come Indian mothers never make their sons do something if they don't want to do something?" She's talking about her brothers, uncle, cousins because they [are] staying with their grandma and their mothers and they never have to

get up and cook. They never have to get up and wash their own clothes because grandma or mom does all that kind of stuff. I said, "It's a cultural thing." From a cultural perspective, this is what they learned. [If] I'm a girl, I've got to wash dishes. I've got to wash clothes. I've got to clean. [But, as a boy], I didn't do anything when I was growing up. I didn't fix my bed, cook, wash dishes. I just went out and played. It's harder to understand and continue the Native culture without including what I've learned. I can function in your world.

His wife Joyce adds that the roles of women are very different in the non-Native community versus the Native community.

You have to make a distinction, especially as a woman. The women's roles are different. I'm working in the real world and competing and everything, speaking out and being aggressive, but you can't do that over there. I have to understand that because, one thing he was like a real equal opportunity teacher and everything, and [was talking about] how important it is for women to be equal. He helped with our kids with everything because we were both working full time but when we went around his mom he kind of took a different role and I took a different role.

When asked what challenges she faces as a Native American in today's culture Anna responded:

There are always challenges. Since you become aware of who you are there are always challenges and with me I always thought that there were two strikes against me already because I was an Indian and I was a girl. I was always just different. I felt like I was looked down upon. But what really made me who I am now is that I thought that I was going to better myself, get an education and move on and never mind what others might think of me. Either way, being an Indian or being a woman.

Earl shares some frustrations about dealing with prejudice at his child's school.

You go different places and they treat you like you're "over there." You don't need to be here. At school, I had to go to school because my daughter was getting in trouble over racist stuff. I had to go talk to the principal and after a while we were talking and he said, "those people" and I said, "what people?" He said, "those people the Indians. They are always causing problems." It's always "those people."

Earl's wife Martha continues.

Some people just don't care. They'll talk to you face to face and tell you how they feel. He works and goes out and I stay home and am around the church family and doing things [so] I don't really see it like he does. We live in two different worlds. As far as I'll go in to a department store or a restaurant out where the white people live. You can see a little bit, but I get to where it doesn't bother me. They'll wait on [someone else] first because [they] are white and they'll say, "Can I help you?" [to a white person] when I am standing there too.

John discusses his experiences with prejudice and racism:

I prayed our kids would [have] light comple[xions] because this dark hair and dark skin gets you in trouble some times. There was a little bit but not as much as these ones that live around here, these so-called full blood Indians that live around here. Just depends on how you look at it. What kind of mood you're in. What kind of attitude you take. You go in somewhere, into a white establishment for instance, if you go in there [with a bad attitude], these people are going to pick up on that. If you go in there just one on one, no race [issues] or anything, then you aren't going to have any problems.

Ayita explains how she has taken it on as her responsibility to educate people about who she is and some of her tribal ways that are misunderstood.

I don't think so either. And let me tell you what I've tried to do with our little neighbor kids. I took them down to my hometown in Craig and they have participated in Indian stuff. Some of our traditions and now they know it's ok to eat out of an old cooked over the fire, open fire food that's been cooked on there. They've eaten some Indian food. They know what Indian tobacco is and why we have it. It's not uncommon to them. I tell them Indian tobacco a long time ago the Indians didn't have the collection plate so the most, the best thing the Indian could do was to offer some of his sacred Indian tobacco and it was just like putting coins in a collection. They thought oh, ok. I understand this. They know to always go in on the left and come out on the right. Just little things. It's no different than going from a Baptist to a Catholic to a Methodist church. I said just get in your mind that we are all praising the same person and we all want to get there. In some different routes but we all want to get to the same place. I just made it and my coworkers I tell them about religion. Some came down to [our grandson's] funeral. Some came down to my mother's funeral and they were just in awe of the simplicity and the deep meaning the little traditions had. I try to educate these people throughout the years so they won't think we are sun worshipping, dog-eating Indians. We're not heathens. We're just simple people. See I've educated quit a few people actually.

Gary discusses that while he has not personally experienced much discrimination, he understands why some may not understand Native Americans.

Let me first say that I personally don't feel that I have ever been discriminated against because I get along in main society without any problem. I think what may be a hinderance is the perception of Native Americans because we are [a] mysterious people [that] you don't know. We have the reservations, drinking, smoking, stay to yourself kind of thing. We have a very strong family system. [Even] here in Osage county, people don't know the Osages. My goodness they have a wonderful history! All tribes do. [But] we have typically been quiet because [we] don't want anybody in.

As seen in the above narratives, participants reported feeling that there are different expectations for them in the non-Native world than there are in the Native world and those variations often cause unique challenges. Many of the participants reported experiencing various forms of prejudice and discrimination from both non-Natives and Natives. The feeling of living in two worlds and trying to balance the expectations of each is a source of stress for these couples.

Loss: "It's lost and we will never get it back."

Loss of Native traditions, language and other aspects of Native American life was discussed often by participants as a major challenge they have faced and future generations will continue to face. Dena shares that many of her tribal ways have been lost due to previous generations, such as her grandparents, being sent to boarding schools where they were not allowed to speak their language, or to carry on their traditional way of life. She also shares that many elders, like her grandmother, do not teach their tribal ways to those who they believe will not practice them. Tribal ways are often shared only with those who might carry them on.

When they started sending students to the boarding school, I think that is when they started losing a lot of practices. You had asked what other tribes I was [in terms of bloodlines]. I am other tribes but I'm not registered as other tribes. When my great-grandpa was sent to Carlen Indian School and my great-grandma was sent there, [it] ended up [that] the only way they could speak to each other was English. They ended up meeting each other and coming back to Oklahoma and residing, and he kind of kept some of his religion and that's where my dad's family kind of goes into the Native American Church and stuff, but they said it was kind of hard at that time to keep those practices up and the language. My grandma could speak [the] Osage language but she would never teach her kids because she said they didn't need to know it. Another thing is they say if you teach us the old way that we have to live it and so maybe that is another reason we are taught certain things and our siblings aren't. The [elders] know we will live it and keep it.

Dena makes it clear that older generations do not always pass along their knowledge of tribal ways if they feel the younger generation will not live according to tribal ways.

Dena also discusses the impact of boarding school on the loss of her Osage language.

Henry provides a picture of how tribal language was nearly wiped out due to boarding school rules concerning language:

What we've learned I don't know if it has really changed during our generation but hearing the older ones talk my uncle's were put in a boarding school and they had stories and I can remember them telling me, my great uncle's, about getting in trouble for speaking their language and they couldn't participate in any kind of ceremonies when they were in that school. They could remember that and they could tell us but as far as what I can remember participating in since we were young it hasn't really changed much. [It] hasn't really affected what we have done, but I know [in] generations past it has. A lot of things were lost.

Paula, who helps with cooking for tribal ceremonies, shares how loss has impacted that part of her life:

I just wished I hadn't pushed it aside growing up. What was lost, I know we've lost a lot, I can tell that from the way they used to cook and the way they used to and the way we do now. People can run out and get a hamburger faster than they can cook it. That kind of thing [the old way of cooking] will probably never come back into existence

Paul shares his belief that the intensity of the old ways and beliefs will not be regained and that many of the old ways have been silenced:

I think some of [the old ways] were silenced and probably will never be brought back. It's lost and we will never get it back. The religions didn't accept the Native Americans spirituality. I feel that the Native American spirituality was more intense than the spirituality that the colonists brought here because they just prayed to one God about the people and the Native Americans would speak to a higher power in that way but they wouldn't just limit it to people. They'd expand it to trees and rocks and grass and everything else. Not just geared towards what that one person needs.

Paul later shares that it is the responsibility the parenting generation to ask the elders questions about tribal ways so that they may pass it on to their children, or will not be lost forever:

If you don't know your ways, you can't pass it on to your kids. So before it is totally and completely lost, ask questions. Find out what it is so you can keep it alive and pass it down to your kids.

George sadly shares:

We're dying out. That's sad. My father's generation and the generation before him, seems like our [traditions] were dying out, language was dying out, a lot of our beliefs were dying out and it's starting to come back to us. It's up to us to keep it going. We brought our strong bloodline back and our existence depends on it.

Eli talks about the language classes that are available for his tribe now and how it would have been different if his elders had passed it down in their own way:

I would have liked to be able to speak fluent Osage growing up. All the [Osage language lessons] they got going now, it's all well and good and everything, but it isn't like it was when my grandma and grandpa and great grandparents were alive. I would have liked to learn it like that instead. Our way [orally, instead of] wrote on a chalkboard.

Steven and his wife, Anna share their experience with their tribal language:

She's lucky because when she started school all she knew was Creek. That's all. So she has a hard time now because you have to use something every day or it starts to get cloudy and she doesn't get to use it everyday

but she can understand it now excellently. The talking comes harder. On me, I can just barely get by like a little 2 or 3 year old so we are losing our language. [Our son] knows less. So within a generation or two that will be gone unless there is a child that was raised by grandparents or something like that. They might be the last ones. That is the biggie, the language. Everything else is based on that like our songs, all kinds of songs. Christian songs, War Dance songs, Court Dance songs, the Black songs, Veterans songs, every kind of song there is. Lullabies for babies, Scalp Dance songs, just all that, they are all based on the Kiowa language. So when you go someplace and hear those songs and know the Kiowa language then you know what they are saying, but if you don't you have no idea then it doesn't mean as much to you. If you hear what they're talking about. It really means something. So you got the songs and then the stories and the history and all those things, which are based on the language; and the prayers. So when that language is gone it's really going to be a big loss.

Anna adds:

The conversational language where you can talk back and forth with different people. English I always considered my second language because I was raised talking Creek so everything I thought and talked was Creek and then going into school I was just there and I didn't know any English at all. I guess it would almost be like an immigrant trying to get into society. I just didn't know anything. I just had to learn. Based on that I failed first grade. I didn't go to Kindergarten; I just went to 1st grade and just walked in. So after that when that happened my parents had to change as far as how they were talking and teaching us in our house. They didn't speak Creek all the time; they started speaking English to the rest of my brothers and sisters. So I would say about two of my brother and sister can speak Creek. They could speak a little bit at that time, but my siblings on down they can't speak it. They understand some but they had to change after me to make sure that English was spoken in the house but they would always go back and forth. Mostly it was English. I have a hard time a lot of times expressing myself because it's still back in my mind where I was brought up speaking that way. So sometimes I have a hard time expressing myself on things I want to say. I want to say it but still sometimes it's hard even after all these years that I've been away from my people where I haven't heard it that much. My mom always says that if you come back home or are around someone who speaks it, if they speak to you again all the time, it's going to come back to you. I believe that because there are some words I've lost and I hear it again and it comes back into my mind and I can just think it and I think how I could say that in the Creek language. But yet I still have a hard time.

The loss of language and old ways is a central topic in the lives of these participants. All of the participants mentioned the loss of language and/or tribal traditions and felt that much of what has been lost will never return. Many of the current tribal activities are focused on preserving what remains and teaching future generations what previous generations had suppressed due to stigma.

In review, the fifth theme focused on the current challenges (A) reportedly faced by these participants. Many of the participants reported that while being active in both faith and cultural practices was time consuming (C), the time spent was a positive influence on their family (B). These participants were also faced with the challenge of meeting both mainstream and cultural expectations (A) and experienced prejudice from both worlds (A). The loss of tribal ways was a major concern (A) for these participants and is a major focus of the family and tribal community (A). While all of these challenges are considered events or situations (A) that a family system might be faced with, they also influence the perceptions (B) and resources (C) that a family will have concerning other challenges. While these challenges are presented as such, they may also be beneficial resources or perceptions that could aid in dealing with other events (A).

Summary

In conclusion, five themes have been presented: 1) Faith and Culture: “They go hand in hand,” 2) Faith and Culture influence Marriage, 3) Generational Transference: “If you don’t have it, it won’t be there,” 4) Religious Coping, and 5) Challenges. Throughout the themes the interconnection of faith and culture is obvious and highly important. While these couples reported several unique

challenges, they also shared numerous aspects of their unique ways that make them strong and able to meet these challenges and live resiliently.

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION

This purpose of this study was to illuminate strengths of highly religious, Christian, Native American, married couples. This study intentionally sampled highly religious, married couples in self-reported strong marriages. It is important to note that this study does not imply that these participants' marriages are strong because they are highly religious. This study did not include non-religious, married couples with self-reported strong marriages or highly religious, married couples with self-reported bad marriages. For this reason it is not appropriate, nor my intention to prove religiosity leads to strong marriages. Instead, this study intended explore the strengths of how and why religious coping is meaningful and influential for these Native American couples' enduring marriages and in their efforts to be responsive parents.

Throughout the dissertation I have used the Contextual Model of Family Stress (ABC-X) as a framework. As I conclude, I will make some general statements concerning the application of this model without using the scaffolding or framework of the model to guide this section. I will begin by discussing conclusions concerning spiritual and cultural beliefs.

Spiritual and Cultural Beliefs

Participants expressed that having similar spiritual and cultural beliefs and backgrounds was very important for their marital relationship, as well as other family relationships (parent and adult child). This similar belief system provided a sense of stability and a similar foundation from which to face challenges. Sharing similar beliefs provided participants with the feeling of being understood and accepted by their spouse and extended family members. This shared foundation helped couples to avoid and

reduce conflict in their marital relationship. Skogrand et al. (2008) reported similar findings.

Parents of this study reported a strong desire for children to believe in a higher power and have a faith. However, it was of little importance for children to be loyal to their parent's denomination. This finding differs greatly from previous research with highly religious families where it has been found the children's specific denominational choice or loyalty is a matter of profound concern to parents. This is often true even within faith traditions. For example, Orthodox Jews not only tend to want their children to be practicing Jews, they want them to be Orthodox Jews, not conservative or reformed Jews (Dollahite & Marks, 2009; personal communication with Dr. Loren Marks, November 2009). This difference for Native American parents may be related to the fact that their faith and culture are so interconnected. Their cultural belief that all things are created by a higher power (God, Creator, Grandfather) and that everything (all of earth's elements, universe, life and death) is connected. It is also important to note that several participants explained that they were in their denomination (i.e. Catholic or Baptist) because their tribe was introduced to that denomination by visiting missionaries or during their boarding school education. They may feel less loyalty to a specific denomination due to the forced conversions that took place in colonial times, regardless of their level of acceptance/integration of these denominational beliefs and practices.

Having shared beliefs may help these families navigate events (A) by having similar perceptions (B) about the event (A) and available resources (C) in such a way as to contribute to lower levels of stress and increased likelihood of resilience.

Religious and Cultural Practices

The participants in this study self-reported as being highly active in both their religious practices and cultural traditions/activities. Participants did not separate religious activities from those that were cultural. Instead, many communicated that everything they do is for God, nothing can be without religion or culture; everything they do is both religious and cultural. Meaningful practices included scripture readings and sermons that included tribal language and traditions, hymns sung in the participant's tribal language at church services, and prayer and prayer songs at both church services and traditional ceremonies. These practices provided participants with meaningful experiences of being closer to God and pleasing God by praising him in the way he intended (through language, song, and dress). Being active in these practices provided participants with a sense of strength that helped them to face challenges and stresses.

It is important to note that participants reported singing only western hymns, translated using their tribal language during church services. The mere act of singing these songs in their native tongue (regardless of their ability to speak the language or understand the translation) provided a much more meaningful experience to the church service. The singing of tribal hymns may provide even deeper meaning due to culturally specific lyrics, however tribal hymns were not discussed by these participants.

Participants stressed that all of their cultural practices were for God and not worshipping idols as outsiders sometimes assume. There is an obvious congruence of Christian and cultural beliefs that influence their practices.

Because these participants are highly active in both their faith and cultural communities (C) and take part in associate practices (B & C) it is likely that these

participants view resources (C) as readily available (B), culturally appropriate (B), and beneficial (B) to their family when dealing with challenges (A).

Faith-Based and Cultural Communities

For these participants their faith-based and cultural communities were comprised of mostly the same people. Many of which are their blood relations or tribal members considered to hold familial roles. These people prove to be of great importance in the social, emotional, and psychological support of these participants. Participants expressed that their faith and cultural communities were a great source of strength for enduring life's challenges ranging from daily stressors to grieving the death of a child.

Participants felt that their community supported them through prayer, emotional encouragement, genuine concern, help with daily tasks (i.e. meals and transportation), and financial support. Knowing that they had people on which they could rely on during tough times provided them with a sense of belonging and confidence in their ability to endure hardships. This finding is similar to that of Skogrand et al. (2008) where participants reported that their faith community was a source of strength for their marriage.

All of the participants had children and some also had grandchildren and communicated such a strong reliance on their faith and cultural community that they referred to them as surrogate parents. Having this support helped alleviate parenting related stress by sharing responsibility. Elders are a critical part of many families' support systems and provide support in rearing these children, regardless of blood relations. This strong and reliable support system provides these parents with an

invaluable and enduring resource pool of wisdom and knowledge with benefits that extend to the entire community.

While being active in both their faith and cultural communities demanded a great deal of time, the participants viewed their involvement as beneficial. Time was not seen as a sacrifice, but as a source of meaningful service and interaction with like-minded individuals. These participants do not simply attend faith and cultural activities; they invest in their community through meaningful service and involvement. This investment is much more rewarding than costly.

These participants reported an abundance (B) of support from their faith and cultural communities (C). These communities included generations of family members, extended family members, and tribal members that were ready to help (C) in the family's time of need (A). These members of the family's support system (C) also presented a challenge (A) for these families in that the expected support to be readily available in their time of need as well (C). These families rely on one another (B) to successfully navigate (X) this challenge (A) and view (B) helping those in their faith and cultural communities as a beneficial, reciprocal relationship (B & C).

Implications

Very little is known about Christian, Native American marriages and families as few studies have focused on this unique population. It is my hope that future clinical practice and research will pay much needed attention to the strengths of Native Americans. Both clinical and research implications are presented below. First, clinical implications are presented with suggestions to provide more culturally appropriate assessment and treatment. Second, implications for future research are provided along

with suggestions that may increase strength-based, scholarly research on Native American marriages and family relationships.

Christian beliefs, practices, and traditions are central to Native American life (Limb & Hodge, 2007). Since Native American's search for balance and harmony includes spirituality, it is vital that those who provide assistance to this population are informed and prepared on how spirituality influences daily life and the therapeutic process. Clinicians need to understand the interconnection of faith and culture and how faith and culture influence all aspects of daily life for these participants. Resources and treatments will be less beneficial for these participants if faith and/or culture is excluded or ignored (McCabe, 2008). What may work for Christian clients from other cultures could prove to be harmful for these participants. Native Americans who seek the help of non-Native practitioners who are not appropriately informed and responsive of the interconnection of their faith and culture are likely to be disappointed due to their differing world-views. It is vital that practitioners prepare themselves through cultural research and experience (McCabe, 2008). Practitioners can better serve this population by becoming aware of the importance of community and extended family networks that exist in Native American communities. This is a rich resource that when ignored and left untapped can be detrimental to the attempts to reach a Native American client.

As discussed previously, faith, in all three dimensions provide a great resource for married couples yet the therapeutic community has yet to fully credit faith as a worthy resource in manuals and training programs. Most clinicians are still uninformed of the strengths provided by faith-based resources. Practitioners need to be aware of the unique

coping resource provided by the three dimensions and address them with sensitivity and respect.

Researchers and practitioners must acknowledge and address the importance of grandparents, extended family members, and non-blood kin as an enduring source of support for Native American families as suggested by research presented in chapter two. While previous research, and the participants of this study both stress the importance of these familial relationships, Native American families would benefit from a deeper and more sensitized examination of how and why these family relationships seem so beneficial. The Administration for Native Americans, a program partnered with the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families, has developed a Family Preservation Initiative focused on promoting "culturally suitable strategies that strengthen Native American communities" through providing: premarital and marital education, support for grandparents raising grandchildren, relationship skills for youth, projects geared towards decreasing family violence, and projects assisting parents (Administration for Native Americans, retrieved October 20, 2009). Culturally suitable programs such as this could benefit from this study and other strength based studies resulting in information regarding what works for Native American families. Although the finding from this study are not generalizable, they provide a starting point for future studies and program components to build upon the strengths I have presented here.

This strength-based view of Native American marriage needs to be included in the educational texts and teachings concerning this culture. The deficit view of the Native American marriage does not provide a well-rounded depiction of this community. This

deficit-based view of marriage in the academic literature has also been common for African Americans. Marks et al. (2008) states that in a family life education class, African American students discussed the lack of strong, enduring African American marriages in the academic literature. The authors suggested that the results of their qualitative study on happy, enduring African American marriages be integrated into “undergraduate, graduate, and community-level Family Life Education settings.” It is my hope that this study will also inform education at those levels concerning strong, enduring Native American marriages.

It is my hope that future research will continue to lend itself to strength-based measures and inquiry. Deficit-based research tends to “ignore essential features of Indian culture and do them a disservice” by sizing up their family systems using measures that define deficits according to the majority culture (Red Horse, 1997, p. 247). Researchers and practitioners need to be aware of and sensitive to the conflicting views and practices of mainstream society versus those of many Native Americans. The world-view of many Native Americans lends itself to the belief that everything is connected and the meanings associated with this world-view differ greatly from that of mainstream society.

Researchers must be aware of the meanings and concepts used by Native Americans in order to appropriately address areas of interest and importance to this unique population.

Researchers need to pay close attention to designing their study components to be mindful and respectful of cultural beliefs and practices. Recruiting Native American participants for scientific research is problematic for numerous reasons. There is much reluctance among the Native American communities for participating in research due to the historical misrepresentation of their beliefs and practices. Many of their beliefs and

practices are sacred and not spoken about to non-natives or persons outside of their tribe or clan. Native Americans are also reluctant to have their stories and experiences expressed in written form due to their traditions of oral communication and storytelling.

Research guidelines for basic cultural competence state that researchers should:

a) become known to and by the tribal community; b) understand the particular tribal community that he or she is studying or working with in terms of history, cultural norms, values, and even language, if required; c) be culturally sensitive to the cultural differences that exist between the tribal community and the service provider or researcher; d) have an understanding of his or her own cultural background; e) respect the community enough to stop his or her research or service provision if it in anyway may bring harm to the community; and f) understand the value biases that he or she may possess (Stubben, 2001, p. 1476).

These guidelines, as well as tribe specific preferences (gathered by meeting with tribal elders) need to be considered prior to the onset of future research projects.

Limitations

While Qualitative research provides a richness of depth and meaning concerning the participants involved, it is not appropriate for generalization or comparison. This study is a representation of the experiences of these thirty participants and seeks to inform the reader about their experiences and meaning making processes. The process of interviewing couples together provided an opportunity for me to observe co-creation of meaning and provides three data points for analysis. However, this process could also cause unobserved gender and power issues that may have impacted the participants stories and limited their responses.

Limitations exist concerning trust; as an outsider of the Native American communities, Native American research participants may be reluctant to trust the researcher and may question the motive for inquiry (Weaver, 2003). The issue of trust

was addressed in several ways. I immediately made my background of non-Native status known, and, second, I took time to hold casual conversation with the participants. These conversations often included information regarding shared personal connections with community leaders, communities and tribal communities, clergy and congregation members, and educational institutions. These casual conversations were steered by the participants in an attempt to find shared experiences from which they used to relate with me, and I with them. This casual conversation prior to focusing on research questions or other business is a culturally sensitive/appropriate way to help participants/clients develop connection and trust with non-Native Americans (Jackson & Turner, 2004). It must be noted that during one of my interviews a participant stated that there were things he could not speak of related to his tribal ways. This is evidence of the trust issue that limits this study due to my being a non-Native researcher and one could only assume that while other participants did not voice this reluctance, it did exist.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to provide strength-based research on highly religious, Christian, Native American, married couples. This study provides a deeper understanding of how and why faith and culture impact the strong marriages and parenting practices of these native American participants. The goal of this study was to acknowledge and introduce the enduring marriages existing within the Native American community and to highlight that these couples rely both on their faith and culture as sources of strength for their marriage and their parenting practices.

This project has provided me with the opportunity to pay my respect to those Native American couples who were leaders in my community and their tribal community,

that provided tremendous examples of strong, faith-based marriages, and continuous support for young married couples in their faith and cultural communities. They are no longer without a story in the academic literature.

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APPENDIX A. DEMOGRAPHIC FORM

Name: _____

Age: _____

Circle One: Male Female

Number of Years Married: _____

Faith Affiliation: _____

Tribe: _____

Number and Gender of Children (i.e., 1 girl, 2 boys): _____

Child(ren's) Age(s): _____

Educational Level (High School, College, etc.): _____

- 1) *If you feel comfortable responding, approximately what percentage of your income do you spend or donate in direct and indirect ways that involve your faith community?*

- 2) *Approximately how many hours a week do you spend in faith-related activities?(including worship services, faith-related meetings, prayer and meditation, scripture study, family worship, youth or children's organizations, service to other congregational members, etc.)*

- 3) *Approximately how many hours a week do you spend in cultural-related activities? (including time at home or in more public arenas)*

APPENDIX B. STATEMENT OF INFORMED CONSENT

Purpose of the Research

I am being asked to participate in a study that examines families and religion. My participation in the study will take 60-90 minutes. I understand that the interviewer will audio record my interview and that she or he will later analyze the interview data.

Rights of Participation

Everything I provide the researcher with will remain anonymous and confidential. If any information from my interview is used in any form, this information will not be accompanied by my name or any other identifying information. I have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) I am uncomfortable answering or request that the tape recorder be turned off for certain responses. I also may end my interview at any time by telling the researcher that I do not want to participate any longer.

Risks and Benefits

There are no known risks for participating in this study. However, this research will help family scholars and professionals better understand the relationships between families, stress, coping, and religion.

Contacts

I have had time to address any questions or concerns I have with the researcher. If I have additional or future questions or concerns, I may contact Dr. Loren Marks at lorenm@lsu.edu or (225)578-2405.

Participation Assurance

I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary.

Consent Signature

Signature

Date

Signature

Date

Please sign and date above if you agree to participate in the study.

APPENDIX C. QUESTIONNAIRE

Faith, Culture and Marriage (Married Couple)

I'd like to ask some questions about links between your faith and your marriage or between your relationship with God and with one another. I am also interested in personal experiences that illustrate your ideas.

1. What are some of your *deepest spiritual/faith beliefs* relating to marriage? Can you give an example of how these beliefs have influenced your marriage?
2. Which spiritual/faith *practices/traditions* hold special meaning for you *as a couple*? Which cultural practices/traditions (or ways) hold special meaning for you as a couple?
3. How do these practices/traditions (or ways) influence your marriage? Could you give me an example or story?
4. How has your *relationship with God/Grandfather/Creator* influenced your marriage? Do you have a specific example?
5. All couples have some conflict. Are there ways that your spiritual/faith beliefs or practices *help avoid or reduce marital conflict*? Are there ways your cultural beliefs or practices (or ways) have helped you avoid or reduce conflict?
6. What do your non-religious friends or family members think you give up because of your faith? (Things that they may feel you sacrifice for your faith?)
7. Do you feel there are any spiritual/faith beliefs or practices that, if *misunderstood or misapplied*, can be harmful to marriage? If so, what are they?

*The second part of the interview asks about connections between your faith, culture and your **family life**; that is between your relationships with God and with family members. I would also enjoy **any personal experiences that might illustrate** the influence of your faith in your family life.*

I. Religious and Cultural Practice and Community and Family Life

1. Which spiritual/faith *practices/traditions* hold special meaning for you as a family?
2. Which cultural practices/traditions (or ways) hold special meaning for you as a family?
3. Can you recall a particular time when these practices/traditions (or ways) really

- helped your family?
4. Is your spiritual/faith community important to your family? Your Marriage? Please explain.
 5. How does your culture (tribal ways) influence your family life? Your marriage?

II. Religious and Cultural Beliefs and Family Life

6. Which of your spiritual/faith beliefs have the most influence on your family life? Which of your cultural/tribal beliefs have the most influence on your family life?
7. Can you think of a time when you believe God/Grandfather/Creator *directly influenced* your family in some way? Do you have a specific story or example you could share?

III. Faith, Culture and Parent-Child Relationships

TO PARENTS:

8. As parents, how do you *share your spirituality/faith* with your children?
9. *How important* to you is it that your child(ren) *follow in your spirituality/faith*? Is it important that they will be the same denomination?
10. How do you share your cultural beliefs (tribal beliefs) with your children? What are the most important lesson you teach your children that have been passed down from generation to generation? Why are these so important?
11. How important is it that your child(ren) follow your cultural beliefs and traditions (or tribal ways)? How would you feel if they did not?

IV. Faith, Culture and Surrounding Culture

- Do your spiritual/faith beliefs influence what you *let in or keep out* of your family life? Do your cultural/tribal beliefs influence what you let in or keep out of your family life? Please provide specific examples.
12. What challenges arise from being a Christian family in the today's society? How do you respond to these challenges?
 13. What challenges arise from being Native American in today's society? How do you respond to these challenges?

V. Challenges of Faith, Culture and Family Life

14. Has your family experienced any *major stressors or challenges* that your spirituality/faith has helped you deal with? Has your family experienced any major stressors or challenges that your culture/tribal ways has helped you with? Could you provide examples of each?
15. Are there any challenges that arise between your spiritual/faith beliefs and your cultural/tribal beliefs? How do you deal with these challenges? (Example).
16. How do you feel that the historical loss of religious freedoms against Native Americans has impacted your beliefs and traditions today? Both spiritual/faith and cultural.
17. If you could give advice to today's Native American married couples about lessons you have learned what would it be? Why is that so important?
18. If you could give advice to today's Native American parents what would it be and why is it important?
19. Please share information that is specific to your tribal ways that is unique from other tribes pertaining to beliefs and traditions that you practice.
20. Is there anything else about your faith and your family life you consider important or interesting and would like to share?

VITA

Mandy Swanson was born in Pawhuska, Oklahoma. She is married to Michael Swanson and has two sons, William Taff and Asa Jay McGuire.

In 2001, Mandy graduated from Oklahoma State University with a Bachelor of Science degree in family relations and child development. She earned her Master of Science degree in marriage and family therapy from The University of Southern Mississippi in 2003. Mandy will graduate from Louisiana State University in May 2010 with a Doctor of Philosophy degree in human ecology.

Mandy is a member of the National Council on Family Relations, the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy, the American Association of Christian Counselors, and Gamma Sigma Delta Honor Society. While earning her Doctor of Philosophy degree at Louisiana State University, Mandy worked for three years as a graduate assistant in the School of Human Ecology.